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LAG Lagrange, M.J.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST.Mark

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Lagrange, M. J.

The Gospel according to
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THE GOSPEL ACCORDING
TO SAINT MARK

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THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO SAINT MARK

BY

THE VERY REVEREND M. J. LAGRANGE, O.P.

Authorized translation from the French

2086

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INTRODUCTION

I. The Evidence of Tradition as to the Authorship of the Second Gospel

The shortest of the four Gospels occupies the second place according to the order which has always been the most common in the Church and which has decidedly prevailed.

This Gospel begins with the preaching of St. John the Baptist and ends with the Ascension of Christ. Therefore it does not include any account of the childhood of Christ, such as is found in Matthew and Luke, or any prologue like that of John. Furthermore, there are fewer discourses than in Matthew, Luke, or John. Almost every section of Mark has its parallel in Matthew, and Mark is very inferior to Luke in the abundance of events narrated. Hence the neglect in which the Second Gospel has often been left. To the credit of a number of modern critics, however, we must acknowledge that they have duly appreciated the marvellous realism of its narratives, the vividness of its reminiscences, and the artless charm of its exquisite descriptions. Far from being Matthew's abbreviator, Mark always relates the same facts at greater length, with details that are not mere literary ornament, but which spring naturally from the events he records as they happened to occur.

Who was the author of this lifelike and simple

Gospel, which, however, so firmly proclaims the dignity of the Son of God?

The early Fathers unhesitatingly assigned it to Mark, Peter's disciple. Let us quote Papias, Bishop of Hierapolis in Phrygia, whose testimony can hardly be later than the year 125. 'Mark, Peter's interpreter, wrote down what the Lord had said or done—so far as he remembered it—accurately, but not in order. For he had neither heard the Lord nor followed him, but later, as I said, he was a follower of Peter, who gave such instructions as circumstances required, and not an orderly account (σύνταξιν) of the Lord's words. Hence Mark was not at fault in writing some things simply as he remembered them. For his one care was to omit nothing that he had heard, and to speak truthfully thereon.'¹ 'Papias here repeats the sayings of an elder (presbyter) who had known the disciples, if he had not been himself a disciple. Thus we go back to Mark's very contemporaries. St. Irenaeus and likewise Tertullian say that the author of our Gospel is Mark, and emphasize his dependence on Peter. Nor do they merely re-echo Papias' words, since St. Justin² seems really to refer to the Second Gospel when he speaks of the *Memoirs of Peter*.

The tradition about Mark's authorship is, then, as explicit as possible. But who was this Mark? He was thought to be a disciple of Peter. In fact St. Peter³ sends the greetings of one Mark, whom he calls his son. As everything indicates, this spiritual son is no other than John, surnamed Mark, mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles. John was a Hebrew name to which was added the Roman surname *Marcus*, known in the

¹ In Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.*, III, xxxix, 15.

² *Apologia*, I, 35.

³ 1 Pet. 5: 13.

East in its Greek form *Marcos*: the custom of having two names was rather frequent at the time.

When Peter was released from prison by an angel, he went at once to the house of Mary, mother of John surnamed Mark.¹ John Mark was, therefore, well known to the Apostle. Being a cousin of St. Barnabas, he was introduced by the latter to St. Paul, and when they set out on their first missionary journey, Mark was their attendant.² For some unknown reason, Mark withdrew from them and returned to Jerusalem. Paul refused to take Mark with him: but Barnabas, rather than part with Mark, gave up Paul's companionship.³ This was about A.D. 52.

Ten years later we find Mark in Rome with Paul, who writes that Mark, Aristarchus, and Jesus the Just 'alone of the circumcision are his fellow-workers for the kingdom of God.'⁴

With the exception of the Apostles, who had been eye-witnesses, no one could be better situated to write the Gospel than this young citizen of Jerusalem, associated with Peter immediately after Christ's death and considered as his very son by the chief of the Apostles. Then, too, Mark was not only Peter's disciple, but as he had a better knowledge of the Greek and Roman languages, he was also the Apostle's interpreter. Being in direct contact with the latter's thoughts, he probably more than once induced Peter to give a greater precision to his recollections so as to secure a more faithful expression of them.

As to the date when Mark decided to write down what Peter taught, especially in Rome, there are two traditions. According to St. Irenaeus,⁵ it was not

¹ Acts 12 : 12.

² Acts 12 : 25.

³ Acts 15 : 37.

⁴ Col. 4 : 10 ; Philem. 24.

⁵ *Adv. hær.*, III, i, 1.

until after the death of Peter and Paul that Mark delivered in writing what Peter had preached.

Clement of Alexandria relates another tradition. 'When Peter had preached the word in Rome . . . many there besought Mark, who had followed him from of old and remembered his words, to write down what he had said ; and Mark composed the Gospel and gave it to those who had made the request of him.' Peter learned of it, but he refused to intervene, either to prevent him or to induce him.¹

The two traditions are not irreconcilable. Modern critics who believe that the Second Gospel underwent various rehandlings, cannot oppose the hypothesis that the several successive attempts of the writer grew, after Peter's death, into a definitive edition. In view of the perfect unity of Mark's work, we would feel inclined to say that during Peter's life Mark was rather slow in giving out his own redaction lest his master's catechesis be received with less interest ; or perhaps the Bishop of Lyons merely ventured a suggestion as to the origin of the Gospel, instead of recording a fact of history.

Internal evidence is rather in support of the Alexandrian tradition. It is generally admitted that the Third Gospel is partially based on the Second. Now, Luke did not write the Acts of the Apostles until after his Gospel : and the former seems to have been completed about the year 62. St. Mark's Gospel therefore was in existence a few years before that date.

According to a tradition that obtained in Rome about the year 200, Mark was said to be the founder of the Alexandrian Church and its first bishop.

¹ Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.*, II, xxv 2.

II. Characteristics of the Second Gospel from a Critical Standpoint

A critical investigation of the Second Gospel brings out characteristics that are in perfect harmony with the statements of tradition.

The Gospel was written in Greek, but it is not a mere translation from the Hebrew or the Aramaic. In particular the intelligent use of prepositions and verbal forms suffices to exclude the hypothesis of a literal translation. The few Hebraic forms to be met with can be sufficiently explained by the writer's acquaintance with the Septuagint or the expressions derived from this version and commonly used among Greek-speaking Jews.

Still, as a whole, the text of Mark is less Greek than that of Luke or Paul. Although Hellenists have come to the conclusion that there was no such thing as a Judeo-Greek dialect, it must be acknowledged that the Semitic element is more apparent in certain works. Such is the case with Mark, whose style is closely connected with the Aramaic form of Christ's teaching and preserves even some Aramaic expressions. While it is not a translation, still it is the reproduction in Greek of an Aramaic catechesis.

The original tone of the discourses and narratives has been preserved in another way, through the style. Mark's narratives are so graphic that they bring us into real contact with the persons. The way they appear on the scene, their gestures and words, enable us, as it were, to witness the incidents ourselves, to penetrate their soul, to visualize the characters. It might be said that the creations of a genius can

produce the illusion of reality. True ; but, even if he does improve on facts, we can always in some way detect, if not his artifice, at least his art. Imagination supplements facts, it can give life to creatures which it invents and combines ; but the very admiration it inspires is enough to reveal its intervention. What is truly natural is not so nicely arranged. Besides, Mark has very little imagination, as appears from a pronounced lack of variety in his style. Rarely does he combine a series of circumstances towards a general effect : they are detached historical incidents, faithfully kept in his memory. Often enough they add nothing to the moral teaching or even to the clearness of the narrative. A more careful writer would not have inserted them : he mentions them simply because they happened.

This is the way we expect an unsophisticated Galilean fisherman, farmer, or artisan to tell about what he saw or heard. An eye-witness is not always an observer or a graphic narrator, such as was the case with Matthew, an accountant of the custom house, used to register facts in view of a special purpose. But a method like Mark's, though not characteristic of a gifted narrator, implies that he was indebted for his information to an eye-witness who had a share in the incidents related and understood them more and more thoroughly under the influence of a personality still alive in his mind and in his heart.

Whether Mark was an eye-witness, internal criticism cannot determine . Tradition called him an interpreter of Peter. This is also what is suggested by the internal evidence. We cannot here reproduce the list of passages that emphasize Peter's rôle. It is enough to have called the reader's attention to so striking a

fact. However, Peter is never depicted with flattering colours, and more than one feature honourable for Peter and mentioned elsewhere has been omitted by Mark. He did not shrink from narrating Peter's faults, both out of regard for historical truth, and also in order to give expression to the Apostle's repentance and loyalty. That he omits several striking incidents of Peter's life is due to the fact that Peter omitted them in his catechesis, and that his disciple, even if he knew of them from other sources, did not wish to offend the humility of the Apostle, who had chosen him as his interpreter.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO SAINT MARK

CHAPTER I

¹ The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Son of God.

² As it is written in the prophet Isaiah :

‘ Behold I send my angel before thy face,
To prepare thy way.

³ The voice of one crying in the wilderness :

“ Prepare ye the way of the Lord,
Make straight his paths.” ’

⁴ John the Baptist was in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of penance unto forgiveness of sins. ⁵ And

The Precursor

I : 1-8. Each of the Evangelists is characterized by a symbol. Mark's is the lion, because his Gospel begins with the mission of St. John the Baptist whose voice resounds like that of a lion in the wilderness. In the Roman world it was naturally in the cities that news was circulated : thus, for example, the glad tidings of an emperor's advent were given out by the magistrates. In the cities also St. Paul preached the glad tidings or the gospel of salvation through Christ. Mark, in tracing the beginning of the gospel, goes further back, to the Baptist's preaching of penance and his message about a new baptism. We should rather

all Judea went out unto him, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and they were baptized by him in the River Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶ And John was

go further still. Isaiah (40 : 3) had announced the return from the Babylonian exile. Eager to go back to Sion and less fearful of the dreary wilderness than of the hostile attitude of the dwellers in cultivated lands, the captives, led by the Lord, had taken the shortest and most direct route. The prophet requested that the road be prepared for the Lord the Saviour of Israel ; and Malachias (3 : 1) had spoken of an angel whose mission was to prepare the way when the Lord would come. Mark quotes from the two prophets under the name of Isaiah, the Messianic prophet *par excellence*, the lesser name yielding to the greater. The ' angel ' is John the Baptist ; it is he who prepared the way for Jesus. He was preaching in the wilderness a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, a forgiveness that was to be received from the One whose forerunner he was. After these few words, which describe John the Baptist as the connecting link between the revelations of old and the salvation announced by the Apostles, Mark outlines the concrete features of the scene. Having assigned John's historical rôle, he pictures the crowds flocking from all Judea to the Jordan. Every Jew was aware of the law that governed the whole national life, namely, that every suffering, especially subjection to foreigners, was a punishment deserved by a sin. In the time of Christ, this sin was not, as under the Judges, a general apostasy. The sense of personal sin had become then more developed ; each individual felt himself responsible and realized that repentance was the first step towards

clad in camel's hair, and had a leathern girdle about his loins, and his food was locusts and wild honey. ⁷ And he proclaimed boldly: 'After me cometh he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I

obtaining the help of God in behalf of all the children of Israel.

The external symbol of that spiritual renewal was baptism, imposed upon the pagans who became proselytes and sought from the Jews the means of adhering to God. The neophyte was immersed in the water and he declared his intention to do away with moral uncleanness, just as his body was cleansed in the water. Perhaps the Baptist suggested to the Israelites also to undergo that symbolic rite, in order to impress renunciation of sin more deeply upon them. When received with these dispositions, the baptism of John must often have been followed by divine forgiveness, though it was not yet endowed with the objective efficacy proper to Christian baptism. The confession of sins was the spontaneous result as well as the genuine proof of repentance.

Mark then gives us a sketch of John as he appeared to the crowd gathered about him, attracted by his fame. He was, indeed, the last of the prophets, recalling by his coarse leather girdle the austerity of Elias (4 Kings 1 : 8). His raiment was made not of wool, but of camel's hair, coarser even than goat's hair. His food was locusts and wild honey, by which we have to understand either the tasteless manna of the tamarisk, or the honey deposited by bees in rocky crevices or in hollow trees. From such a diet—though incompletely described here—ordinarily, at least, meat and bread were surely excluded.

am not worthy to stoop down and loose. ⁸ I have baptized you with water, but he shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit.'

⁹ And it came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized in the

Mark is aware of the impression that such austerity produced on the people. He draws attention to it without any fear of reflecting on the character of Christ, to whom the great ascetic had paid homage. John was conscious of his mission, namely, to be only the servant of the One who was to come. When the master returns from a journey, or simply when he is about to enter the house, a slave unfastens the straps of his sandals, stooping down and kneeling on both knees, whilst the master remains standing or sits down. John does not deem himself worthy to perform this humble service for him who is to come. He baptizes in water ; he could indeed preach penance and bring souls to repentance : but he could not impart the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, or the Spirit of God, had more than once come down upon those whom God intended to endow with strength or wisdom. But Israel expected a more abundant and more efficacious outpouring in the days of salvation—the days of the Messiah. Now John, considering his own mission as a preparation for the work of a mightier One, calls the work of the Messiah a more perfect baptism ; water could cleanse but the body : the Holy Spirit can purify souls through a new baptism.

The Baptism of Jesus

9-II. What a strange manner of narrative ! Mark has paved the way for a solemn entrance of the Messiah.

Jordan by John. ¹⁰ And straightway, as he came out of the water, he saw the heavens rent asunder, and the Spirit coming down upon him as a dove ;

Are we not led to expect that this supernatural being is coming in the strength of the Spirit to baptize John ? Nothing of the sort : it is Jesus who receives baptism ; for this had really come to pass, and tradition kept the memory of that fact. Jesus comes from Nazareth where he grew up. Nothing distinguishes him from other men. He acts as did every pious Israelite. He had no need of repentance ; but since all Israelites were invited to a moral and spiritual regeneration, it was not proper that he seem to let the call go unheeded. Jesus is baptized by John. Thus is the transformation of baptism outlined for us. The Spirit comes down upon Jesus who will impart the Spirit ; a voice, that of the Father, greets him as the Son of God.

If we recall that Christian baptism, administered by the Apostles in compliance with Christ's command (Matt. 28 : 19), is given in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, we realize at once the meaning of this scene. Baptism ushers us into the Church and confers a right to enter heaven ; it is essentially connected with a confession of faith in the Holy Trinity. It is the first of all the sacraments, the divine adaptation of a natural element into an efficacious instrument of sanctification. Since this efficacy proceeds from the Passion of Christ, it was fitting that such a continuous miracle be inaugurated in some way by a contact of Christ with an ordinary baptism, hinting at the possible efficacy of water when used in connection with the invocation of the

¹¹ and there came a voice from heaven, 'Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I am well pleased.'

¹² And straightway the Spirit drove him out into

three divine persons. The first step to be taken by a Christian is patterned on this inaugural act of Christ. In a certain manner, this is the beginning of the Gospel.

But it does not consist in a transformation of Jesus' soul: the 'glad tidings' are the declaration proclaimed by the Father. Among the heretics of the early centuries who believed in Christ's divinity, some, as Marcion, for example, thought that at his baptism, Christ-God had come down from heaven. Some unbelievers among our contemporaries imagine, no less arbitrarily, that, then, Jesus realized how his more perfect faith, his trust in God, his fellowship with him, made him truly Son of God more than other men and even in a transcendent degree. But neither the former nor the latter can base their view on the narrative of Mark, a witness of Christian baptism, a disciple of Paul who was a believer in Christ's pre-existence and divinity, or more simply, a Christian like the others who received the more complete narratives of Matthew and Luke. The reason why Mark does not mention that the glorious manifestation was perceived by the crowd, seems to be that the baptism was not a manifestation of Messianic glory but, above all, the starting-point of Christ's ministry, the signal given to him by the Father, the impulse that he received from the Spirit.

The temptation in the wilderness

12-13. Matthew and Luke narrate this episode with abundant details, whilst Mark gives us only a

the wilderness. ¹³ And he was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan, and he was with the wild beasts, and the angels were ministering to him.

¹⁴ And after John had been delivered up, Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of God, ¹⁵ and

summary. Before beginning his ministry, Jesus is impelled by the Spirit, that is, led by his inward impulse, into the wilderness. Satan tempts him, evidently to lower him and turn him away from his mission, and the angels minister to his needs. The mention of wild beasts—a graphic touch proper to Mark—is calculated probably to complete the picture of that solitude. Jesus' victory was such a foregone conclusion that Mark does not even mention it.

The subject-matter of Christ's preaching

14-15. As he hinted before, Mark presents the preaching of Jesus as a sequel to that of the Baptist. It is only after the latter's imprisonment—the details of which will be given later on (6 : 7)—that Jesus *proclaims* the gospel. He began his ministry in Galilee, his own country, where men's souls were simpler and better disposed. But far from justifying Renan's idyllic description of that period of his ministry, he continued to preach penance as John had done, adding to it that the kingdom of God was near : he announced it, and that was the glad tidings that were to be believed, the gospel of God. Many years before, the prophets had expressed their presentiment of a mightier action of God to bring men to serve him better. Ardent imaginations had pondered over that theme. Jesus does not yet give explanations ; but

saying, 'The fulness of time is come and the kingdom of God is nigh; do penance and believe in the gospel.'

¹⁶ And passing by the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew, the brother of Simon, casting their nets in the sea, for they were fishermen.

¹⁷ And Jesus said to them, 'Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men.' ¹⁸ And straightway leaving their nets, they followed him.

¹⁹ And proceeding a little further, he saw James the

the very fact that he summons to repentance signifies man's share in the great work of God.

The call of the first four disciples

16-20. Jesus wished to have co-labourers. The first chosen were fishermen, perhaps simply because in going up to Galilee Jesus walked by the Lake of Gennesareth, called a sea after the Hebrew name, for lack of another word. Perhaps, too, because from the outset he wished to mark their essential office with a striking symbolic feature. The world where men come and go, bent upon business or pleasure, is, in the eyes of Christ, like a sea. Just as fishermen catch fish, so the Apostles will have to be fishers of men, but in order to save them. Such is the special call addressed by Jesus to Simon and to his brother Andrew, when from a boat at some distance from the shore they were casting the net which was so constructed as to catch fish in deep water. Simon and Andrew understand and straightway obey; this act of theirs is more easily understood if we remember the previous meetings with the Master (John 1: 35-43). James and John, the sons of Zebedee, leave even their father. Mark says 'with the hired men.' This seems to

son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were also in their boat, mending their nets. ²⁰ And straightway he called them. And leaving their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, they followed after him.

²¹ And they enter Capharnaum ; and straightway on the sabbath going into the synagogue he taught.

²² And they were astonished at his doctrine ; for he was teaching them as one having authority, and not

indicate that Zebedee was a man of some means ; but the obedience of the two brothers was nevertheless a sacrifice. From the beginning, renouncement of family ties was demanded from the ministers of the gospel.

Jesus teaches, and cures a demoniac in the synagogue at Capharnaum

21-28. At the northern end of the lake, in the most fertile region of Galilee, stood the city of Capharnaum; it sloped down to the lake crowned with its fringe of flowering oleanders. There stood a very fine synagogue replaced in the second century by a still more magnificent one, the ruins of which can be seen at Tell Hum. On sabbath days there was teaching in the synagogue. This explanation of the word of God given to the people evidently implied divine revelation ; hence it was completely unknown to classical antiquity, so fond of all kinds of public speeches. In Israel it was very popular. The people tried to understand the meaning of the Bible ; they were told of the practical applications of the Law to their daily life and were urged to observe it more faithfully. But no one would have dared to settle doubts or suggest new ideas on his

as the scribes. ²³ And straightway there was in their synagogue a man possessed by an unclean spirit, and he cried out, ²⁴ saying, 'What is between us and thee, Jesus of Nazareth? Thou art come to destroy us! I know who thou art—the holy one of God!' ²⁵ And Jesus rebuked him, saying, 'Be silent, and go out of him.' ²⁶ And the unclean spirit threw him

own authority. Jesus, from the very first day, did not hesitate to do so; and he made it clear for the Galileans that the kingdom of God began with the advent of one who spoke as having authority of his own. No more of that tedious repeating the decisions of previous rabbis: a new revelation was now imparted.

Others also understood it—the evil spirits, called unclean because of the sins that most frequently foster their domination. One of them, who had usurped possession of an unfortunate man, impelled him to deprecate Christ's interference. 'What is to us and to thee' is a Semitic expression which might mean: 'Why dost thou interfere?' And, as often happens, the devil imprudently confesses the dignity of Jesus. A holy 'one of God' is a person specially consecrated to God, united to him by intellect and heart, who belongs to him as an object exclusively devoted to his service. 'The' holy one of God is that, but in a special and even exclusive manner. (Luke 4: 34; John 6: 69). This holiness was the opposite of the impurity of those estranged from God. Jesus does not deign to expose the devil; he rebukes and silences him, and expels him. But the evil spirit does not obey without throwing his victim into convulsions accompanied by loud cries.

Mark assigns a twofold motive to the stupefaction

into convulsions, and with a loud cry went out of him.

²⁷ And all were amazed, and questioned among themselves, 'What is this? [Here is] a new teaching given with authority and he commandeth even unclean spirits, and they obey him!' ²⁸ And straightway His fame spread everywhere throughout the neighbourhood of Galilee.

²⁹ And straightway, going out of the synagogue, they came to the house of Simon and Andrew, with

of the hearers. They wonder, not merely at the miraculous and irresistible command, but also at the authority of Christ's teaching already mentioned. The first miracle of Christ recorded by Mark is clearly given as a confirmation of his doctrinal authority. It is in these terms that the fame of the new and true master is spread at first. He thus exposed himself to the enmity of the scribes, those tireless defenders of rabbinism, but he proclaimed himself the revealer of secrets not yet communicated to the world by his Father. How forcibly St. Paul preached this doctrine to the Ephesians!

The cure of Peter's mother-in-law

29-31. The second miracle is wrought in behalf of the mother-in-law of the first disciple called by Christ and immediately accepted by him on terms of intimate friendship. Hence Simon is anxious to bring Christ to his home where his brother Andrew and his mother-in-law were living. Other friends were present, James and John; and as this woman was sick, they simply tell Jesus about it, without asking for any favour. Christ took her by the hand, lifted her up from the bed where she was lying without having undressed.

James and John. ³⁰ Now Simon's mother-in-law lay in a fit of fever ; and straightway they tell him about her.

³¹ And drawing near, he lifted her up, taking her by the hand ; and the fever left her, and she was ministering to them.

³² And when evening was come, after sunset, they brought to him all the sick and the possessed ; ³³ and the whole town was gathered round the door. ³⁴ And he healed many who were troubled with various diseases, and he cast out many devils ; and he

The fever left her and she began to minister to the guests. This is, as it were, a miracle of the intimate family circle. The supernatural permeates this house as a light breath. But Simon had understood, and no doubt it is he who narrated so simple a scene in the hearing of Mark. Who can tell how deeply it touched the heart of the simple fisherman who had already given his heart to Christ ?

Numerous miracles. The gospel is spread

32-39. That first day of preaching ended with miracles. As it was a sabbath day, they waited until the sun had set—when the holy day of rest ended—then they brought to him the sick and the possessed. Mark does not say that Christ healed them all, but ' many ' to show both God's liberality and the freedom of his own choice. Perturbed by this sudden irradiation of the gospel, the devils proclaimed its author ; but the Saviour wished to continue his work in lowliness and did not allow them to speak. This has been called ' Mark's injunction of silence.'

The gospel had been preached first at Capharnaum.

suffered not the devils to speak, because they knew him. ³⁵ And in the morning, long before daybreak, he arose and went forth to a desert place, and there he prayed. ³⁶ And Simon and those with him hastened after him; ³⁷ and they found him and said to him, 'All seek for thee.'

³⁸ And he saith to them, 'Let us go elsewhere, to the neighbouring towns, that I may preach there also, for I came forth to this purpose.' ³⁹ And he went preaching in their synagogues throughout Galilee and casting out devils.

⁴⁰ And there cometh to him a leper beseeching

This was only a starting-point. Again Jesus goes into a desert place where he wished to pray. Simon, who lived in Capharnaum, took the lead of those who wanted to keep him there. But Christ opposes them by declaring that his mission was not to be confined to such narrow limits.

St. John in his Gospel explains how Christ came from the Father; here Jesus seems to say merely that he came out of his own country and gave up his ordinary occupations to take up an itinerant life. In order to conform to custom and to secure a ready audience, he will preach in the synagogues of Galilee. At the same time he will make use of his supernatural power to deliver men from the sway of the demons.

Healing of a leper

40-45. A more wonderful case of healing caused such an impression that many eagerly followed Jesus, even into desert places. This is the progress marked by the healing of the leper. The Hebrews gave indiscriminately the same name, translated into Greek

him, and kneeling down, saying to him, 'If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.' ⁴¹ And moved with compassion, he stretched forth his hand, touched him, and said to him, 'I will; be thou made clean. ⁴² And straightway the leprosy left him, and he was clean.

⁴³ And speaking to him severely, he hurried him off; and said to him: ⁴⁴ 'See thou say nothing to any man, but go, show thyself to the priest, and offer for thy purification what Moses commanded, for a witness unto the people.' ⁴⁵ But the man, having departed, began to speak freely and to spread abroad

lepra, to several kinds of skin diseases. But they certainly knew the tubercular leprosy with nodules on the articulations of fingers and toes, such as it is found nowadays in Jerusalem. To avoid the contamination of others—which is so dangerous in certain skin diseases—all those called lepers had to dwell outside of cities (Lev. 13: 15). When they had reason to believe that they were healed (which could never be the case with genuine leprosy), they must appear before a priest, who probably gave them a certificate.

A leper came to our Lord, who was there in a house. The words of the afflicted man will ever come to the lips of those who painfully feel how much they need purity. Jesus having compassion on the sick man, healed him. But he severely rebuked the Israelite for having transgressed the Law; he sent him away and commanded him that, when in possession of the priest's certificate which he would be able to show to people, he should be silent about the cause of his cure. A new evidence of the care with which Jesus tried to avoid popular agitation. Of course the leper did not

the whole story, so that [Jesus] could no longer enter a town openly, but remained without in desert places ; and they came to him from all sides.

CHAPTER II

¹ And when he had again entered Capharnaum after some days, it was reported that he was in a house. ² And they gathered together in large numbers, so that there was no room left even about the door. And he was speaking to them the word. ³ And they came carrying unto him a paralytic, who was borne by four [men]. ⁴ And as they could not bring the sick

obey. And the excitement aroused by this cure shows that this case of leprosy was of the most serious kind.

Healing of a paralytic

2 : 1-12. The first chapter described the rapid progress of the gospel. Jesus indeed seems to be no less desirous to remain unknown than to preach the kingdom of God. But the people's enthusiasm was bound to arouse the attention of the spiritual heads of the nation, especially the authorized interpreters of the Scriptures, the doctors called scribes, on account of their zeal in copying or studying the Law, all of whom belonged to the sect of the Pharisees. They were wondering by what authority Jesus preached so earnestly a doctrine which seemed to be new, or more plainly they were wondering whether he would accept their leadership, whether he would be friend or foe. Mark expresses this new conflict in five discussions ending with a crisis (3 : 6). For the people's sake,

man unto him because of the multitude, they uncovered the roof [above the place] where he was, and having made an opening they let down the pallet on which the paralytic lay. ⁵ And Jesus, seeing their faith, saith to the paralytic, 'My child, thy sins are forgiven.' ⁶ Now there were certain scribes sitting there and reasoning in their hearts: ⁷ 'How doth this man speak

Jesus is led to show forth his own power, and the religious changes which were to take place under his impulsion.

The first contact with the scribes takes place in connection with the paralytic's cure. Jesus had returned to Capharnaum and was in a house the entrance of which was obstructed by the crowd. But access to the roof could be had by the outer staircase leading to the terrace. Four men lifted up a paralytic on his pallet. As the roofs in Galilee were made of beams joined together with reeds and stones, it was easy enough, by displacing one of the beams, to dig out an opening to let down the pallet, not however without filling the house with dust. It was rather useless after that to ask for a miracle; the faith of those men and of the paralytic was as evident as their desire. Jesus is moved by such faith and he immediately rewards this supernatural disposition with another supernatural favour, the remission of the sins of the paralytic, whom he affectionately calls 'My son.'

A prophet could remit sins in the name of God (2 Kings 12: 13), but Jesus had not claimed any special revelation. Some scribes who were present began to spy upon the Master. With perfect truth, they claim that God alone can forgive sins and, as

thus? He blasphemeth! Who can forgive sins but God alone?' ⁸ And straightway Jesus, knowing in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, saith to them: 'Why do you reason thus in your hearts?' ⁹ Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, "Thy sins are forgiven," or to say, "Arise, and take up thy pallet, and walk?" ¹⁰ But that you may know

they do not grant Christ any right to speak in God's name, they necessarily conclude that he blasphemes, that is, that he usurps the rights of the divine Majesty. Jesus does not ask them to confess his divinity at once, but to acknowledge that he did not exceed the power inherent to his mission. While it is easy enough to assume a power that no one can verify, to announce a miracle is to take a very serious risk, in the case of failure. If, then, Jesus performs at will a miracle such as all the bystanders can witness, they must believe his word. He calls himself 'Son of Man,' and he performs the miracle, not to parade as Messiah, the King expected by Israel, but to prove that he has the right to remit sins. From this, his first self-affirmation, he insisted less on the honours due to his person, than on his spiritual power, his mission, on the salvation that he was bringing to souls. He, a son of man like every one of his brethen, but still the Son of Man *par excellence*. What was the exact meaning of this title, no one perhaps could have analysed exactly; it was in harmony with the Saviour's human career of humility and suffering, and was to be replaced later on by the name of Christ and Lord, when it was recognized that this Man was so united to the divine nature that the Son of Man was also the Son of God.

that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins'—then saith he to the paralytic, ¹¹ 'I say to thee, arise, take up thy pallet, and go to thy home.' ¹² And he arose, and straightway taking up his pallet, he went forth in the sight of all, so that all were amazed and glorified God, saying, 'We never saw the like.'

¹³ And he went forth again by the sea; and the whole multitude kept coming to him, and he was teaching them. ¹⁴ And as he was passing along he

Agreeably with the gravity of the present circumstances, Christ's command is formal, precise, imperative. Most likely those who glorified God were the whole crowd rather than the scribes whose thought had been disclosed and confuted.

The call of Levi

13-17. Everything in this episode is redolent of mercy; and as the mercy of men does not compare with that of God, the scribes were scandalized. Celsus pretended to be shocked, and Origen, somewhat embarrassed, explained that not all the Apostles were publicans. (*Contra Cels.* I, 62). Jesus is still on the seashore, but he addresses his call to one Levi who was sitting at the bureau of customs, busy with his accounts. Capharnaum was an important town on the boundary of the states of Herod Antipas and of the tetrarch Philip his brother, on the great highway from Damascus to Judea and the Mediterranean coast. There was there a custom house and place for the collection of taxes, probably in the hands of the same firm. Collecting taxes implies such constant supervision that ancient states did not like to assume this function. They sublet this office to publicans,

saw Levi, the son of Alpheus, sitting at the receipt of custom ; and he saith to him, ' Follow me.' And he rose and followed him.

¹⁵ And it came to pass that he sat at table in the house of Levi, and many publicans and sinners sat down together with Jesus and his disciples—for they were many and followed him. ¹⁶ And the scribes [of the sect] of the Pharisees seeing that he was eating with sinners and publicans, said to his disciples, ' Why

trying to protect themselves by edicts which remained powerless to prevent fraud by agents who charged excessive rates, or by people who managed to avoid paying their taxes. Subordinate agents, likewise called publicans, found abundant profits in extorting money from poor people, without giving any account to their employers. Hence they were both hated and despised. There is no indication that Levi was guilty of such extortions as Zacheus eventually confesses (Luke 19 : 8). Jesus calls him and he obeys immediately. The Gospel of St. Matthew substitutes the name Matthew for that of Levi. Perhaps Levi had two names, or took a new one. Jesus, by calling a man who was accustomed to writing and bookkeeping, may have designed in advance him who was the first to write down his teaching and his life.

Levi had probably made some money by his profession ; when he became Christ's disciple, he gave a banquet in the Master's honour, with his former associates. Besides publicans, Mark mentions also sinners either because the Jews held them as unfaithful to the Law, or because their life was not in harmony with the canons of morality. Though their dispositions were now better, since they followed Jesus,

doth he eat with publicans and sinners?' ¹⁷ And Jesus hearing them said: 'They that are well have no need of a physician, but they that are sick. I came not to call the just, but sinners.'

¹⁸ Now the disciples of John and the Pharisees were fasting. And they come and say to him, 'Why do the disciples of John and the Pharisees fast, while thy disciples do not fast?' ¹⁹ And Jesus said to them: 'Can the children of the bridalchamber fast

still the Pharisees would not consent to eat with them, lest they might be taken as belonging to their number or lest they might contract some legal impurity which it was difficult to avoid in such company. Hence their reproaches and Christ's reply. He begins by quoting a proverb which is clear enough and which he applies to himself. Were there really just men? Were those who believed themselves just, really just? These questions were neither asked nor answered. Certainly there were sinners, and no matter who they were, it was to call them, that Jesus had come from heaven to earth. His condescension is not indifference, as is too often the case with those who quote his example to entertain bad acquaintances for selfish purposes. Christ is with sinners to save them.

Fasting, old and new

18-22. It was an ancient custom in Israel to fast, that is, to abstain from food until sunset, in order to express to God sentiments of penance. This bodily mortification was the symbol of the humbling of the guilty before their Lord. One day of fast only was prescribed in the Law of Moses, that of the day of expiation (Lev. 16: 29), but custom had introduced

while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast.
²⁰ But the days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast, in those days. ²¹ No one seweth a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; else the patch teareth away [something] from it—the new from the old—and a

others, at least among zealous people, such as the Pharisees, and also the disciples of John the Baptist, the great ascetic. Why did not the disciples of Jesus, so earnest in preaching the kingdom of God, imitate this practice? About Jesus himself, no one dares to ask the question: he who remitted sins might think himself exempt from the duty of fasting. Hence the Master answers only for his disciples and he does so with a kind of parable. A wedding celebration is a time for joy and feasting: it is not the time for fasting. Should the bridegroom suffer a tragic accident, his relatives would mourn for him and consequently would fast, to show that after such a cruel loss they do not care to live. Christ's words, 'The day shall come,' express clearly that Jesus himself, who is the bridegroom, will be taken away from the affection of his friends, *i.e.* the disciples. They will fast in those days, namely, after his death. Doubtless the disciples were eager to put into practice what was, if not an explicit command, at least a prophecy of a very fitting attitude. Fasting therefore is of Apostolic origin, an expression of the feeling of grief experienced by a Christian soul that remembers the Saviour's death; thus Good Friday is the climax of Lenten fast.

With what certitude Christ already speaks of his death in veiled words, in the style of his time and

worse rent is made. ²² And no one poureth new wine into old wine-skins ; else the wine will burst the skins, and wine and skins are lost. But new wine into new skins !'

²³ And it came to pass that he was walking through the cornfields on the sabbath ; and his disciples, as

country ! He uses two similitudes, the meaning of which is very clear, more so even for plain people than for others. He clearly means that he intends to train his disciples in his own way, to impart a new spirit to them, rather than to have recourse to an unsatisfactory compromise. Still he never intended to break away from the Old Law in his own private life. The comparison is between the Baptist's school and his own. John's disciples receive a new inspiration ; but to it they adapt ancient customs created by the tradition of the Pharisees, or more exactly, they try to enliven those ancient practices by pouring a new spirit into them. Jesus' disciples will have to follow his doctrine only, without any compromise whatsoever with the tradition of the Pharisees. Furthermore, the two parables could be understood of a relationship between the Old Law and the gospel. Though Christ did not abrogate the Old Law, during his lifetime he uttered prophetic words to pave the way for the doctrine that Paul would express so strongly.

First question concerning the sabbath

23-28. Among the outward obligations imposed on the Jews, the most important was the keeping of the seventh day by a strict rest. But the Pharisees, by forbidding the most insignificant actions, had surely exceeded the spirit of the Law, while they invented

they walked along, began to pluck the ears. ²⁴ And the Pharisees said to him, 'Behold, why are they doing on the sabbath what is not lawful?' ²⁵ And he saith to them: 'Have you never read what David did when he was in need and was hungry, himself and they that were with him?' ²⁶ How he entered the house of God, in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and

clever tricks to evade the Law. The sabbath was their own ground. Thus it was natural enough that they should start the conflict on that ground. Orientals like to chew dried grains, peanuts, pistachio, or even corn. Custom had made it lawful for anyone to pluck a few ears when passing through a cornfield and to rub them in the hands in order to loosen the grain. This was likely what the disciples were doing, though Mark does not say explicitly that they ate the corn. According to the Pharisees, this was equivalent to preparing a meal on the sabbath, a forbidden practice, since all preparations were to be made the day before. Jesus does not consent to discuss such casuistry. Even though the proscription should go that far, it must not be imposed in the case of necessity; and it is likely enough that the disciples would not have done that if they had not been hungry. Christ goes back to principles. All Scripture, divinely inspired, has the same authority as the Law of Moses. Now we read in the book of Kings that David considered as non-existing the law concerning the show-bread, which it was not lawful for anyone to eat except the priests (Lev. 24: 5). Still David's action was not blamed. The high priest mentioned in the Book of Kings (1 Sam. 21: 1-6) is Achimelech. That Mark speaks of Abiathar, is due probably to the fact that

ate the show-bread, which it is not lawful for any to eat except the priests, and also gave thereof to them that were with him ? '

²⁷ And he said to them : ' The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath ; ²⁸ so that the Son of man is lord even of the sabbath.'

Abiathar was better known as the high priest in the time of David. The allusion to the Old Testament narrative is not a Biblical quotation, but a narrative recast by Christ with the express mention of David's companions, so as to make his decision more strikingly in favour of his disciples.

The same reasoning could apply to the law concerning the sabbath. Some laws are based on the nature of things, and ultimately, on God's nature. Laws of this sort have an eternal value. But there are others positively instituted by God for the good of man. Among these is the law of the sabbath, which is meant to procure to man a wholesome rest sanctified by the remembrance of divine favours. Such law no longer obliges when its observance would turn to man's damage. It would be an exaggeration to infer from this that man is master of the sabbath ; for he has no right to abrogate that law or arbitrarily to exempt himself from it. But this at least can be inferred, namely, that the Son of Man, sent by God, is master even of the sabbath ; and that his interpretation of it is a legitimate one. We may add that some illustrious Jewish doctors, among them Aqiba, admitted the principle that ' the care of life dispenses with the law of the sabbath ' ; but it remains true nevertheless that the majority of Pharisees, like those mentioned in the Gospel, upheld the narrowest decisions.

CHAPTER III

¹ And he again entered the synagogue. And there was a man there, who had a withered hand. ² And they watched him [to see] whether he would heal him on the sabbath, that they might accuse him. ³ And he saith to the man who had the withered hand, 'Stand forth into the midst.' ⁴ And he saith to them, 'Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath or to do harm? to save a life or to kill?' ⁵ But they were silent.

Second question on the sabbath

3 : 1-6. The crisis becomes acute. Now the Pharisees no longer interrogate; they spy. A crippled man was sitting in the synagogue; everyone was expecting him to ask for a miracle. But it was a sabbath day. The rabbis sanctioned the saving of a life on that day, but nothing more. No care was to be given to the sick. It was forbidden even to pour water on a sprained arm or leg, or to cause blood to flow from a wound. What would Jesus do? He did not leave them long in doubt. He bids the man with the withered hand stand out in their midst, so that the case may be clearly placed before all. Then he takes the offensive, as it were, by a question. According to the Semitic method, the opposition of the terms is absolute. Their opposition spreads a vivid light, though it is somewhat difficult to analyse it, on account of its concise form. 'Is it lawful,' he asked, 'on the sabbath day to do good, or must we, in observing the sabbath, do harm to our neighbour by refraining from doing him good? Is it lawful to save life, or must we run the risk of causing death, at least by abstaining

And looking around on them with anger, grieving over the hardness of their heart, he saith to the man, 'Stretch forth thy hand.' And he stretched it forth, and his hand was restored. ⁶ And the Pharisees went out and straightway made a consultation with the Herodians against him, how they might destroy him.

⁷ And Jesus with his disciples retired to the sea, and a great multitude from Galilee followed him; and

from saving it? ' Even Pharisees would have answered that it was lawful. Therefore it was a good act. Now, why not give the same answer every time a morally good action seemed to conflict with a positive law? In fact those Pharisees met the question with a stolid silence. Their heart was obstinately closed to compassion. Mark reveals to us Jesus' sadness and indignation before such obduracy. A miracle settled the question in the name of God.

The Pharisees came to some other conclusion. This doctrinal solution given by Christ was not bolder than the preceding one, but his attitude made it clear that his spirit was opposed to theirs and that he would not submit to their yoke. Now, in Galilee, they could not do anything against him without the help of Herod's officers or courtiers, and in the small Oriental courts the two names are really synonymous. Mark calls them Herodians. They were generally regarded as enemies of the Pharisees, who hated those foreigners and pined for the restoration of David's throne.

The upheaval spreads over the whole land of Israel

7-12. Christ's activity recalls that of the first evening at Capernaum (1 : 32-34). The same eagerness of the people, the same loving kindness of the

from Judea, ⁸ and from Jerusalem, and from Idumea, and from beyond the Jordan, and from the neighbourhood of Tyre and Sidon, a great multitude came unto him, hearing of all his doings. ⁹ And he bade his disciples that a small boat be kept ready for him because of the multitude, lest they should throng him. ¹⁰ For he healed many, so that all that were ill were throwing themselves upon him to touch him. ¹¹ And the unclean spirits, when they saw him, fell down before him and cried out, saying, 'Thou art the Son of God.' ¹² And he strictly charged that they should not make him known.

¹³ And he goeth up into the mountain and calleth

Saviour in healing the sick, the same casting out of devils. If they render him homage by still more clearly calling him the Son of God, it is because they are disconcerted and, in spite of themselves, confess their defeat, or because they hope to counteract his mission by exciting the false zeal of the Pharisees. What is new in Mark is the fact that the excitement is spreading over the whole country that God had given of old to Israel. It is not in Galilee only, but in the south, in Judea and Jerusalem, that centre of worship, and the seat of the rabbis' domination, and still further south, in Idumea, which had returned to Judaism since John Hyrcanus' conquest; it is in the country beyond the Jordan, in the neighbourhood of Tyre and Sidon, pagan cities where many Israelites were living.

Calling of the Twelve

13-19. Anyway, some provision must be made to reach those who were not coming to hear the Master.

whom he would, and they went unto him. ¹⁴ And he appointed twelve, to be with him, and that he might send them to preach, ¹⁵ with power to cast out devils. ¹⁶ So he appointed the twelve; ¹⁷ and to Simon [he gave] the name Peter, and James the son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James—and he surnamed

Jesus chooses co-labourers. But they themselves must be taught, before they can teach others. Hence Mark's charming expression, 'to be with him.' They are friends to whom he gives himself before sending them. The choice comes from him; it is made on a mountain, considered by the Semites as nearer to God, and by the Israelites as the place where intercourse with God was easiest, since the revelation to Moses on Mount Sinai. The Saviour chooses twelve on account of the twelve tribes of Israel, a type of the new people of which the Apostles were to be the leaders. Simon is named first and receives the surname Peter (Kepha in Aramaic). The two sons of Zebedee come next, for they alone with Peter will be admitted to witness the raising of the daughter of Jairus, the Transfiguration of our Lord, and his agony in the Garden of Olives. Jesus gives them an Aramaic name which Mark interprets 'Sons of Thunder,' on account of their ardent zeal as emphasized in one of Luke's narratives (9 : 54). Andrew, Peter's brother, comes next: his name is Greek ('virile') as is that of Philip ('lover of horses'). Bartholomew ('son of Talmi') was called also Nathanael (John 21 : 2), 'God gave.' Thomas, called also Didymus or the 'Twin' (John 11 : 16). James the son of Alpheus ('replacing') is most probably the same as James, the first bishop of Jerusalem, 'the Less' as he is commonly designated to distinguish him from

them Boanerges, that is, sons of thunder—¹⁸ and Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alpheus, and Thaddeus, and Simon the Zealot, ¹⁹ and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

²⁰ And he cometh to the house ; and again the

the James the Greater, son of Zebedee. The second Simon is distinguished from the first by his surname, 'the Zealot.' He, most likely, belonged to that sadly famous party who, by their zeal for God's government, had been led to reject all authority, and became wild followers of fanatics or clever politicians, as always happens to anarchists. But Simon, enlightened by Jesus, had only the kind of zeal which devoured Paul (Gal. 1: 14). There were also two Judases. The former, called by Luke 'son of James' (12: 10), is here called Thaddaeus ('broad-chested') to distinguish him from the other Judas surnamed 'the man of Qiriath,' the Apostle who betrayed the Master after having been chosen that he should be with him. What a terrible lesson ! So far as God is concerned, he does not repent of his gifts ; but it is in the power of our free choice to render them useless.

The mention of Judas is a proof that the twelve had really been chosen by Jesus in order to form a distinct body, that of the friends who were to survive the Spouse and continue his work. Judas' name would never have been inserted in the list if the group had not been well-defined.

Wondering of Christ's relatives

20-21. The new company of Jesus is to have nothing in view but the preaching of the kingdom of God,

multitude cometh together ; so that they could not even take food. ²¹ And when his own people heard of it, they went out to lay hold on him, for they said, ' he is beside himself.'

²² And the scribes who had come down from Jerusalem said, ' he is possessed by Beelzebul,' and, ' It is by the prince of devils that he casteth out devils.'

²³ And calling them unto him, he said to them in parables : ' How can Satan cast out Satan ? ²⁴ If a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot

with all the risks and difficulties which that entailed, even to the point ' that they could not so much as eat bread.' Jesus' kinsmen considered this zeal excessive. Moved by a too human compassion, they came to get possession of his person that they might put him under constraint, for his own sake, since he was beside himself, that is, since he did not follow the rules of common sense. They appeared again later (31-35). Just now Christ's mother is not mentioned : we have no right therefore to attribute to her the judgement of these relatives, even if she happens to be with them later on. It is but fair to mention that distinguished commentators (Schanz, Knabenbauer) think that we should not translate ' the relatives of Jesus,' but ' some of his friends at Capharnaum.'

By what authority Jesus casts out the demons

22-30. Here for the first time we see scribes who come from Jerusalem. It was their province, and they were perhaps requested, on account of their prestige as teachers, to explain the power which Jesus exercised over the devils. Their insolent solution was that Christ was himself possessed by Beelzebul, the

stand; ²⁵ and if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand; ²⁶ and if Satan hath risen against himself and is divided, he cannot stand—he is come to an end. ²⁷ No man can enter the strong man's house and plunder his goods unless he first bind the strong man; then indeed shall he plunder his house. ²⁸ Amen I say to you, all sins shall be forgiven the sons of men, sins and [even] whatsoever

prince of devils, whose orders were obeyed by the demons.

This name Beelzebul, 'the lord of filth,' was probably a sarcastic transformation of Beelzebub, 'the lord of flies,' (2 Kings 1: 2, 3, 6, 16). St. Jerome, who was aware of this fact, restored the ancient name in the Vulgate. People said Beelzebub instead of Satan, perhaps because the same Aramaic word meant both 'lord of flies' and 'adversary.' So he who was establishing the kingdom of God upon the ruins of that of Satan, would have been but the agent of a cleverly dissimulated perfidy. But what results could it produce? To that paradoxical hypothesis of too subtle teachers, embarrassed and blinded by hatred, Jesus opposes common sense. Domestic divisions among men bring only ruin; this was sufficiently well known after the civil wars which had shaken the Roman world. The same principles apply to the devils. The true explanation of their downfall is that their chief is already conquered. The people must have understood that Jesus was the mighty one who had fettered Satan. Then the Master pronounced a terrible sentence against those who calumniated his works of loving kindness. Blasphemy itself, uttered in a flash of anger, offends God, yet it does not shut the door of

blasphemies they may utter ; ²⁹ but whosoever blasphemeth against the Holy Spirit never hath forgiveness, but is guilty of an everlasting sin.' ³⁰ Because they said, ' He hath an unclean spirit.'

³¹ And his mother and his brethren came, and standing without sent unto him to call him.

³² Now there was a multitude sitting about him, and they said to him, ' Behold, thy mother and thy brethren without seek thee.' ³³ And answering

repentance. But to make such a terrible mistake as to see the deeds of the devil in the work of salvation, to ascribe to an impure spirit what comes from the Holy Ghost, is to exclude oneself from the way of salvation, to preclude the way of return. Understood thus, the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit by its very nature excludes forgiveness ; but one may always hope from God's mercy enough light and grace so as not to remain in a sin so absurd and fatal.

The relatives of Jesus

31-35. Mark here names the mother and the brethren of Jesus. If they are the same persons who were mentioned in verses 20 f., we must suppose that he has introduced here the episode of Beelzebul to give them time to arrive. In the present passage there is no mention of their uneasiness, but only of a search, so that one might distinguish here two different episodes, though this way of interpreting the text does not seem very probable. Jesus does not rebuke his relatives, but takes advantage of their presence to impart to them a lofty teaching. Blood relationship creates sacred duties. But this is not to the point. The Saviour does not deny those duties, but since he

them, he said, ' Who is my mother, and my brethren ? '

³⁴ And looking round upon them that sat round about him, he said : ' Behold my mother and my brethren !

³⁵ Whosoever does the will of God, he is my brother and my sister and my mother.'

CHAPTER IV

¹ And again he began to teach by the seaside. And a very great multitude gathered together unto him, so that he went up into a boat and sat [being] on the sea. And the whole multitude was on the

came to save souls, he has no more binding ties than those which unite him to souls whose will is subject to that of his Father. Once for all, he states the superiority of the kinship of charity over that of blood, especially for him who leaves his own in order to save souls. Nothing is said of the actual dispositions of Christ's mother and brethren. Mark could not be ignorant of what Luke so well emphasized : Mary's eagerness to do the will of God. We shall examine later who were those ' brethren ' of Christ (6 : 1 ff.).

THE PARABLES

The parable of the sower

4 : 1-9. From the beginning of his preaching, Jesus indeed spoke in parables, as Mark has noted (3 : 23). But tradition preserved the graphic and suggestive features of what might be called the day of parables : on the shore the vast multitude, Jesus teaching from the fishing-boat in readiness to take him away from the crowd (3 : 9). The good will of

land, by the seaside. ² And he taught them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them : ³ ' Hearken ! Behold the sower went out to sow. ⁴ And it came to pass that, as he sowed, some [seed] fell by the wayside, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵ And some fell upon stony ground, where it had not much earth, and straightway it shot up, because it had no depth of earth ; ⁶ and when the sun rose it was scorched ; and because it had no root it withered away. ⁷ And some fell among thorns ;

all seemed to have been all that could be desired ; but Christ deemed it of the utmost importance to bring forth the conditions required so that the preaching given in the name of God might obtain all its results. Hence he utters the parable known as the parable of the sower, which, however, treats rather of the conditions of the soil in which the seed is sown.

In a country where the road is often nothing more than a footpath passing through cultivated fields, no one wonders that the sower might have dropped some seed on the path. As the seed is not buried by the harrow, it is devoured by the birds which flutter overhead, ever ready to snatch the grain, even before it touches the ground. Bare rock in many places breaks through the surface of Palestinian soil ; of course the sower avoids these bare surfaces, but he is not always careful to avoid those spots where the rock is covered only by a thin coating of earth. The seed will grow there, even faster, since it is not buried very deep ; but the stem will be dried up by the sun, because the roots cannot get moisture enough in that ground. The thorns which, instead of being uprooted, have been burned down together with the straw that was

and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no fruit. ⁸ And other seed fell upon good soil, and it grew up, and made increase and yielded fruit, and it bore, one thirty, another sixty, and another a hundred.' ⁹ And he said, 'He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.'

¹⁰ And when he was alone, his disciples and the

left over after the preceding harvest, grow again together with the good seed and choke it. Lastly, the rest of the seed, most likely the greater part, will fall in the good ground and bring forth those abundant harvests which, in the popular language, are spoken of as bringing forth even a hundredfold; and in fact this hundredfold is mentioned by ancient writers who say it was a common return in the plains of Babylon. Thus set forth, without any explanation, this could hardly be understood without some serious thinking: hence our Lord invites his hearers to concentrate their attention.

The mystery of the kingdom of God, or why Jesus spoke in parables

10-12. The purpose of the parables has been a disputed question and is still more so to-day. It would be an imperfect way of stating it, if we should reduce it to a contrast between mercy and justice; both of those divine attributes work simultaneously.

Three things are clear. First, Jesus taught by parables because this simple method was more adapted to the minds of his hearers than a form of didactic teaching would be. This is clearly implied in Mark 4: 33.

Secondly, Christ did not employ parables, at a

twelve asked him the parables. ¹¹ And he said to them : ' To you the mystery of the kingdom of God

certain period of his preaching, in order to punish the Jews by withdrawing light on account of their resistance to a clearer teaching. For he had taught by parables from the beginning, and on the day of parables there was a greater eagerness than ever in the vast multitude gathered out of several towns ; it is evident that among those who listened to the parable of the sower many were fit hearers. The refractory ones were the Pharisees ; but the parables were chiefly addressed to the multitude.

In the third place, it is certain that Jesus explained the parables to his disciples, thus imparting to this privileged class a clearer and deeper knowledge. For the parable is a familiar similitude throwing the light of a commonly received truth upon a question not yet elucidated. When the parable follows the question to be elucidated, it illustrates the point as fully as possible. When it is proposed alone by itself, it is not clear what the application may be. But then it quickens the attention as does an enigma ; he who does not understand it must confess his inability to grasp it and must ask for a solution. Thus did Christ ordinarily proceed, in order to quicken the good will of his hearers. Doubtless the Good Shepherd would not have refused anyone a more complete explanation. But if the multitude remains indifferent, he has to restrict his deeper teaching to the small circle of his disciples.

In fact, the people neither understood nor even wished to understand the kingdom of God such as Christ preached it ; because they had no relish for a spiritual concept so contrary to their Messianic ideal.

has been given, but to them that are without, all things are done in parables,

¹² That gazing they may not perceive,
And hearing they may not understand,
Lest they should be converted and be forgiven.'

They failed to understand the parables because they did not desire to do so ; and rejecting the true kingdom of God, they rejected also the Messiah who came to establish it by his word and his death. Though still attracted by Christ's ascendancy, by the hope of being cured, they went away because of his austere doctrine, to return again and withdraw again until they finally abandoned him. This blindness of the people, like every other event, had a place in the Providential order : it recalled the attitude of Isaiah's contemporaries who despised the light sent by God as a supreme warning. This is why Jesus mentioned this ancient oracle to his disciples. The latter knowing full well that God, when speaking, wishes us to listen to him, and when commanding, desires to be obeyed, just as he sends his prophets that we may be saved, could not hesitate about the deep significance of the parallelism between the days of Isaiah and the actual situation. In both instances, there was the same stubbornness allowed by God, willed by him according to the stiffness of a vocabulary that had not our theological precision to distinguish between the two concepts. According to our way of speaking, the expression 'in order that' or 'lest' of verse 12 means simply 'so that,' 'thus.'

As to the more efficacious grace conferred upon the Apostles, it depends both on God's supreme will and on the correspondence of their own free will.

¹³ And he saith to them : ‘ Do you not understand this parable ? How then shall you know all the parables ? ¹⁴ The sower soweth the word. ¹⁵ Now there are those by the wayside, where the word is sown ; and when they have heard it, straightway Satan cometh and taketh away the word sown in them. ¹⁶ So, too, those sown upon the stony ground are those who, when they have heard the word, straightway receive it with joy, ¹⁷ and they have no root in them, but are variable ; then, when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, straightway they are scandalized. ¹⁸ And there are others that are sown among thorns ; these are they that

Explanation of the parable of the sower

13-20. It cannot be denied that there is a certain awkwardness in Mark's construction. This is due to the fact that, instead of taking up again each situation in the parable, to show what is meant when it is applied to the different classes of hearers, he mixes the parable and its explanation, introducing, for instance, ‘ those by the wayside ’ to express that the fate of the seed fallen on the wayside is like the fate of those men who hear the word of God, but without any profit for their soul : its efficacy is checked by Satan. If we might give a more precise application of the parable, we would think of those who have no faith. What good can even the most solid and the most touching sermon do to their souls ? Among Christ's hearers there might have been pagan scoffers who mocked instead of thinking. Others in large numbers most likely applauded the new doctrine of the Master, which was so gentle for the poor and the afflicted. But should the spiritual

have heard the word, ¹⁹ and the cares of the world and the delights of riches and lusts of all sorts enter [into them and] choke the word, which cannot bring fruit.

²⁰ And those that are sown upon good soil, are those that listen to the word and receive it and bear fruit, the one thirty, another sixty, and another a hundred.'

²¹ And he said to them : ' Doth the lamp come in to be put under the bushel or under the bed ? Is it not to be set on the lampstand ? ²² For there is

leaders of the nation threaten them with their disfavour, they easily fancied that perhaps Jesus was wrong, and what had charmed their mind became a stumbling-block to them. Nowadays human respect would assume another form and would accept the dictates of a false science. As to those who are carried away by the allurements of the world, history repeats itself. The good ones are those who listen—for even to listen requires some effort—who adhere to the word with their whole hearts, and put it into practice. The metaphor of the harvest and its abundance brings us back to the original similitude.

**The mystery must be known ; we should show
ourselves worthy to receive it**

21-25. Mark introduces two similitudes which were probably uttered on two different occasions, the more so that the connection between the two is not very close. ' And he said to them ' (verse 24). Both are related to the wonderful fate of that word which was not destined to enlighten, according to what Christ had said of the mystery of the kingdom of God (verse 11). For the word is like a lamp, and a lamp so truly made to illuminate that it is not put under an object that

nothing hidden save that it should be manifested ; nothing remains secret but that it should come to light. ²³ If any man hath ears to hear, let him hear.'

²⁴ And he said to them : ' Take heed what you hear ; in what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you, and more shall be given to you ; ²⁵ for he that hath, to him shall be given ; and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even the little that he hath.'

²⁶ And he said : ' So is the kingdom of God, as if a

would conceal it, but set on a candlestick : just as those modest lamps of clay unearthed at Jerusalem, on which is written the motto *Lumen Christi*. And such will really be the fate of Christ's teaching. The secret confided to the disciples is only a temporary secret which later on must be made manifest. They must not obscure the light which it was their privilege to receive. The more eager they are to receive the word, the more secrets will be entrusted to them. Is not this the law followed everywhere ? And it is but just. The little that he has is taken away from him who does not know how to use it ; even more is given to him who knows how to invest profitably what has been entrusted to him. So Luke uses this saying in the parable of the minas (19 : 26). Everyone will receive according to his capacity, which will be increased by practice and diminished by inaction. The last saying has a paradoxical tone, since, where there is absolutely nothing, nothing can be lost. But we know so many ' who have nothing.'

The seed growing up secretly

26-29. This short parable, one of the few peculiar to Mark, is not intended to encourage inactivity, so

man should cast seed upon the earth, ²⁷ and should sleep and rise night and day; now the seed springs and grows up, whilst he knoweth not how. ²⁸ For of itself the earth beareth the crop, first the blade, then the ear, afterwards the full corn in the ear. ²⁹ But when the crop is ripe, straightway he putteth in the sickle, for the harvest is ready.'

³⁰ And he said: 'To what might we liken the

strongly blamed in the preceding verses. It opens a vista on the kingdom of God taken as a whole. When the sower has sown the seed, he need not intervene until harvest time. At least, such is the case in Palestine where summer storms that might strike down the wheat are unknown. Even if this happened, what could he do? So the soil and time will do their work; when the wheat is ripe, then it will be time to act.

So will it be with the kingdom of God. We were told that the sower was Christ, and the seed he was sowing was his word, the first germ of the kingdom. It would certainly develop, without any need of co-operation through revolutions or extraordinary manifestations. God, on his part, would not bring the world to an end before the wheat come to maturity. This was indeed one of those secrets which were to be unveiled later on. After the disappearance of Christ, who had founded a kingdom destined to grow, the Apostles will understand that this kingdom must develop without the Master's presence. Only at the end of the time, will he come to garner the harvest.

Parable of the mustard seed

30-32. It means also the kingdom of God. Jesus aroused the attention of his hearers by feigning to look

kingdom of God, or how could we set it forth in parable? ³¹ It is like to a mustard-seed, which when sown upon the earth—being the least of all the seeds upon the earth—³² and when it is sown it groweth up and becometh greater than all the herbs, and shooteth out great branches, so that the birds of the air can dwell beneath the shade thereof.'

³³ And in many such parables he spoke to them the word, according as they were able to hear [it]; ³⁴ and without parable he did not speak to them; but privately he explained all things to his own disciples.

for a comparison, and he takes the humblest of all seeds, the mustard seed. Is there any relation between the majesty of the kingdom and this little thing? Is it the energy hidden in the mustard? No; but both objects, after very lowly beginnings, are destined to grow. And as the parable is easily transformed into an allegory, the gentle Teacher of the people shows the birds of the air dwelling in the shadow of the plant, as Ezechiel had represented the kingdom of the Messiah under the image of a big tree. (Ez. 17: 23). The people thus learned that the kingdom of God had begun, and that its development would suffice to realize the designs of God with regard to the salvation of mankind. The Lord would attain his end without the fulgurant manifestations in which too ardent imaginations were revelling.

Twofold teaching imparted by parables

33-34. We used this passage when explaining the purpose of the parables (4: 10-12).

³⁵ And he saith to them on that day, when evening was come, ' Let us pass over to the other side.' ³⁶ And leaving the crowd, they take him in the boat just as he was, and other boats were with him. ³⁷ And there cometh a great squall of wind, and the waves were dashing over into the boat, so that the boat was now filling. ³⁸ Now he himself was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they awake him and say to him, ' Master, does it not concern thee that we perish ? ' ³⁹ And awaking, he rebuked the wind, and said to

The stilling of the tempest

35-41. One of the narratives which best brings out the graphic character of the Second Gospel is this account of the stilling of the tempest. It is full of details which evidence the eye-witness. This witness—St. Peter certainly—had still in his memory, we might almost say before his eyes, details that a more severe writer would have neglected as useless. Jesus had remained in the boat whence he had taught his parables, and had not made the preparations which a journey demands. Still, upon a word from him, the disciples who manage the boat take him ' as he is.' Other boats follow, of which we are not told anything afterwards. On a sudden a storm begins to rage ; a south-western whirlwind, most likely, sweeps down with fury on the little lake enclosed in the deep hollow, and becomes a hurricane. As many a traveller has learned to his cost, the danger threatening the frail boat is not exaggerated. Jesus was asleep on the cushion arranged for him at the stern. The disciples address him as a somewhat inert companion, of whom they still expect some help, without knowing exactly

the sea, 'Peace! Be still!' And the wind fell, and there was made a great calm. ⁴⁰ And he said to them, 'Why are you fearful? Have you not yet faith?' ⁴¹ And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that the wind and sea obey him?'

CHAPTER V

¹ And they came to the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gerasenes. ² And when he had left the boat, straightway there came to meet him

how the help will come. He, however, speaks to the lake as to a hostile power. Did he perceive in an apparently commonplace incident a snare of Satan eager to get rid of him? More likely he is simply using the Semitic style which treated as persons the great forces of nature, especially bodies of water. The wind and the sea obey. And then he addresses his disciples, as a sailor might address his less fearless comrades; and he turns their eyes towards his person in whom they were to trust. Had they not yet understood? No, for even then they ask themselves whence could such power come to him. Still they do not ask, 'What kind of power did God give him?' but, 'Who then is this?' Thus do we get a vivid glimpse of the relations of Christ with his closest followers. No striking declaration from him; no demand of respect. And still, little by little, light grows in those simple souls, and a proper distance is kept even in his intimacy.

The Gerasene demoniac

5: 1-20. Here is another narrative, the realism of which is the best proof of its historical authenticity.

from the tombs a man possessed by an unclean spirit, ³ who had [his] abode in the tombs, and no man could bind him any more even with a chain ; ⁴ for he had been often bound with fetters and chains, but he had broken the chains into pieces and destroyed the fetters, and no one could tame him ; ⁵ and he was always, night and day, in the tombs and in the mountains, howling and cutting himself with stones. ⁶ And seeing Jesus from afar, he ran and fell down before him ⁷ and crying with a loud voice, he said, ' What is between me and thee, Jesus, Son of the Most High God ? I adjure thee by God, torment me not ' ; ⁸ for he was saying to him, ' Thou unclean spirit, go out of the man.' ⁹ And he asked him, ' What is thy name ? '

Not long ago there could be seen in the porches of Palestinian churches insane people in chains, who were supposed to be cured by this harsh treatment. Such was probably the fate of the man who ran forward to meet Jesus on the opposite shore of the lake. The text does not say that he was a danger for the passers-by ; but he was strong enough to break his chains, and gash himself with stones. The tombs where he dwelt were holes in the rocky hillside and large enough—as so many other tombs—to be used as dwelling places. Many can still be seen near the top of the high hill of Qala'at el-Hosn, which overlooks the eastern shore of the lake, and where the town of Gamala was located, not far from Gadara on the Hieromax. Origen suggested Gergesa instead of Gerasa, after an ancient tribe destroyed by the Israelites. The name Gerasenians must be an allusion to the distant town of Gerasa or to another village which no longer exists. In this region, where Israelites were much fewer than the

And he saith to him, ' Legion is my name, for we are many.' ¹⁰ And he besought him much that he would not drive them away out of the country. ¹¹ Now there on the mountain was a great herd of swine feeding. ¹² And they besought him, saying, ' Send us into the swine, that we may enter into them.' ¹³ And he gave them leave. And the unclean spirits came out and entered into the swine ; and the herd rushed down the cliff into the sea, about two thousand in number, and were drowned in the sea. ¹⁴ And they that fed them fled and told of it in the town and in the hamlets ; and they came to see what had happened.

pagans, there were raised large numbers of swine, classified by the Law as impure animals. Religious questions did not trouble those people as they did the people of Galilee. Hatred or love on one shore of the lake, indifference on the other.

The scenery and the inhabitants, everything in this narrative of Mark is in harmony with known facts. But it is more than a description. There is the meeting of Jesus with an evil spirit, or rather a legion (about six thousand) of evil spirits as the devil is pleased to assert, perhaps not without some exaggeration. The demoniac calls Jesus Son of the Most High, that is, of the God of the Jews—an expression which is very natural on the lips of a Gentile—and when threatened with expulsion from the body of the person whom he tyrannizes, he begs leave to enter the herd of swine, so as to inflict a painful remembrance upon those whom he is about to leave in peace. And Jesus, if we may so speak, allowed them this caprice !

Before trying to understand this strange conflict, we need to dwell on the wonderful change which took

¹⁵ And they come to Jesus, and they see the demoniac, the man who had had the legion, seated, clothed and in his right mind ; and they were struck with fear.

¹⁶ And they that had seen it recounted to them what had befallen the demoniac, and about the swine. ¹⁷ And they began to invite him to depart from their borders.

¹⁸ And as he was embarking in the boat, the man that had been possessed began to beseech him that he might be with him. ¹⁹ And he admitted him not, but saith to him : ' Go into thy house unto thine own,

place in the person of the demoniac. This wild and sordid being now enjoys the use of his reason, and his first act is to get decently dressed. In a spirit of gratitude, he seeks to become a friend of his healer. The contrast between the two situations foreshadows the change wrought by the gospel among men exposed and addicted to the manifold influences of evil. Such is the work of the Saviour towards us, and we understand and appreciate it from the bottom of our heart. What does it matter if we do not understand his relations with the mysterious world of evil spirits ? The Church that believes in their existence knows also that they cannot conquer us against our will, the more so that their superior light is offset by their blindness. The demoniac confesses Jesus to be the Son of the Most High, boasts that he himself is as powerful as an army, hopes to make the Saviour ridiculous or odious in the eyes of the owners of the swine for not having prevented the destruction of the animals. But what a moral lesson in this sympathy of the devils for animals that symbolize uncleanness ! The devils dreaded being sent back to the infernal abyss and they rush headlong into the lake. Is it of their own

and tell them of all that the Lord hath done for thee, and how he took pity on thee.' ²⁰ And he went his way and began to publish in the Decapolis all that Jesus had done for him; and all men wondered.

²¹ And when Jesus had again crossed over in the boat to the other side, a great multitude assembled together unto him, and he was at the seaside.

²² And there cometh one of the rulers of the synagogue named Jairus; and seeing him, falleth down

volition? We repeat that everything is mystery in a mysterious realm. Let objections in the name of the right of ownership be raised by those who are so compassionate at sight of the waste of the precious swine. As a matter of fact, the owners do not seem to have complained. Their indifference to things supernatural does not prevent Jesus from giving them an apostle in the person of the cured demoniac.

Decapolis designates a confederation of ten cities inhabited mostly by Gentiles. During the life of Christ the preaching of the kingdom of God was reserved to the people of Israel. The healed demoniac was to give to his countrymen but an inkling of it by telling the great things that the loving kindness of the Lord had done unto him.

Jairus' daughter, and the woman with an issue of blood

21-43. His aim accomplished—such is the conjecture we base on the facts—Jesus returned to the western shore and the multitude gathered again around him with an eagerness sharply contrasting with the indifference of the Gerasenes.

Tradition (Mark, Matthew, Luke) ascribes to this

at his feet ²³ and beseecheth him much, saying : ' My little daughter is at the point of death ; come, lay thy hands upon her, that she may be healed and may live.'

²⁴ And he went with him. And there was a great multitude following him, and they were pressing upon him.

²⁵ Now a woman, who had had an issue of blood twelve years, ²⁶ and had suffered much from many physicians, and had spent all that she had and was nothing the better, but rather worse, ²⁷ when she

date a twofold miracle, one of them incidental, as it were, to the primary one, which was the raising of Jairus' daughter. This man, designated as *archi-synagogos*, may have been the chief ruler of one of the synagogues of Capharnaum, the nearest town of importance, or rather one of the presidents of some synagogue. This title may have been owing to his social station, or to his knowledge of the Holy Scriptures : his name Jairus is Hebrew and Biblical. In spite of his rank, he casts himself at Jesus' feet ; for he was a father and his daughter was dying. He fervently begs the Saviour to come and lay his hand upon her—Jesus' usual gesture in healing the sick (6 : 5)—so that she may be healed, for she must live. The mention of the throng that followed him prepares the reader for the miracle which, as we might say, was about to be stolen from him on the spot.

A woman who for twelve years had suffered from a flow of blood, which made her legally unclean (Lev. 15 : 25), decided that, to be cured, she needed only to touch the Saviour's garments. According to ancient custom, still strongly prevalent among us, she had consulted many physicians, but her condition grew

had heard about Jesus, came behind in the crowd and touched his garment ; ²⁸ for she said, ' If I touch but his garments I shall be healed.' ²⁹ And straightway the flow of her blood was dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of her infirmity. ³⁰ And straightway Jesus, knowing in himself that power had gone forth from him, turned about in the crowd and said, ' Who hath touched my garments ? ' ³¹ And his disciples said to him, ' Thou seest the multitude pressing upon thee, and sayest thou, ' Who touched me ? ' '

worse. Her faith suggests another remedy, and she is healed because of her faith. What is surprising to a Christian is that, according to Mark's narrative, the Son of God notices it just as if he had not freely decided to perform the miracle, and asks, ' Who touched my garments ? ' as if he did not know. Evidently this does not refer to Christ's divine nature and his infinite knowledge ; but even as a man, did he not enjoy the beatific vision which enabled him to know all things ? Though not an article of faith defined by the Church, this is at least a very solid doctrine which the Church does not permit her children to deny. Yet neither the beatific vision nor the infused knowledge and manner of knowing which is very much like that of the angels, —both so eminently fitting with the dignity of a human nature hypostatically united to the divine Word—did not prevent Christ from acquiring an experimental knowledge of facts, an experimental knowledge like that which characterizes men, his brethren. It is the fact of this acquired knowledge which enables us to explain several expressions in the Gospel, like those met with in this section. It may even be said that, in the ordinary course of his life,

³² And he looked round about to see her who had done this. ³³ But the woman, fearing and trembling, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell down before him and told him the whole truth. ³⁴ Then he said to her : ' Daughter, thy faith hath saved thee. Go in peace, and be thou free from thy disease.'

³⁵ Whilst he was yet speaking, they came from the house of the ruler of the synagogue, saying, ' Thy daughter is dead ; why dost thou trouble the Master further ? ' ³⁶ But Jesus, having heard what was

when he was not revealing the mysteries of his divine existence or disclosing the secrets of the future, the Saviour acted like other men, either in the field of knowledge or as regards his meals and his sleep.

What is especially interesting in this miracle is that we perceive in the very human nature of Christ a perennial source of benefits of which we can take advantage, provided we have faith. God allowed that to happen on this occasion so as to emphasize more strongly the healing power of that contact with Jesus which takes place in a spiritual but absolutely real manner in the Holy Eucharist. The master was aware of the healing power emanating from his body through his garments, since he tells the crowd about it ; still he asked the question and his eyes wandered over the many faces until his glance fell on the woman who had been healed, The disciples' remark is more familiar than respectful, but just as natural as was the woman's fear ; at first she was joyful, but afterward afraid of the possible consequences of her rashness. Faith, which inspired her, prompted her to confess the truth and, as was fitting, Christ spoke with supreme authority.

said, saith to the ruler of the synagogue, 'Fear not; only believe!' ³⁷ And he admitted not any man to accompany him save Peter and James, and John the brother of James. ³⁸ And they come to the ruler's house; and he beholds a tumult, and people wailing and lamenting loudly; ³⁹ and entering, he saith to them: 'Why make you this tumult and lamentation? The child is not dead, but sleepeth.' ⁴⁰ And they laughed him to scorn. But he having put them all out, taketh the father of the child and her mother and those with him, and entereth where the child was. ⁴¹ And taking the child by the hand, he saith to her,

This incident had caused hardly any delay. But just at that moment, a message reached Jairus, stating that his daughter was dead. It would have seemed folly to ask for a resurrection, though the Scriptures mentioned instances (3 Kings 17: 19 ff.; 4 Kings 4: 33) in the history of Elias and Eliseus. Indeed there was here occasion for Jairus to exalt his faith above that of the woman just healed. But a resurrection might have caused such a commotion that Jesus surrounds his deed of loving kindness with a certain mystery. He takes three disciples with him, and he declares to the mourners that the child is only asleep. The truth of this statement could have been known to himself alone; for, owing to his intervention, that death was to be shorter than a sleep. The certitude with which the mourners ridicule his declaration is the best answer to the Rationalists who advance the hypothesis of an apparent death or a lethargic sleep. Jesus ejects the crowd of mourners; but admits the girl's father and mother to the joy of seeing their child restored to life. Peter, the principal witness,

'*Talitha, Kum,*' which signifieth, 'Maiden, I say to thee, arise!' ⁴² And straightway the maiden arose and walked; for she was twelve years old. And they were straightway lost in amazement. ⁴³ And he strictly charged them that no one should know this, and he bade them give her to eat.

CHAPTER VI

¹ And he departed thence and came to his own country; and his disciples followed him.

² And when a sabbath was come, he began to teach

used to repeat in Aramaic, the vulgar tongue in Palestine at that time, the two words uttered by our Lord. The child arose and walked. 'She was twelve years old,' St. Mark tells us, and he also notes the Saviour's solicitude, bidding them give the child some food: the miracle once wrought, nature had to have its course.

Jesus at Nazareth

6: 1-6. With the exception of the scribes, the Galileans of the lake shore, when they did not fall under the scribes' influence, were in sympathy with Jesus. Their eagerness to listen to him showed their good will; if they asked for miracles, that was because they hoped to obtain them. Since they had not witnessed the early years of the Master's life, they might vaguely imagine that he had received instruction from the doctors in the schools, or God's revelations in solitude.

Not so in his own country, the little town of Nazareth where he and his parents had lived (1: 9, 24). His fellow-countrymen, like everybody else, were struck

in the synagogue; and many hearing him, were astonished and said: 'Whence hath he come by these things? And what wisdom is this that is given him, and such miracles as are wrought by his hands? ³ Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses and Jude and Simon?

by his wisdom, and they had heard about his miracles. But they thought they must needs reduce to its just proportions what was rumoured about. After all, Jesus had exercised a carpenter's trade, which had nothing in common with a prophet's attitude. His relatives were well known. He was not therefore a Messiah come down from heaven. Is it a rare phenomenon to see men refusing to acknowledge genius in a former classmate? Since nothing distinguished him when he was at school with them, how can it be that he is now a great man? Of Jesus they say: 'the son of Mary,' which means, as Renan declared, the only son of a widow. His sisters and brothers are mentioned only afterwards. If Mark had not wished to distinguish him from them, he would have written: son of Mary, as also James, etc. In the Scripture Mary is spoken of as the mother of Jesus only. The faith of the Church in her perpetual virginity has been constant. Only heretics have denied or questioned this dogma. Some ancient Fathers thought that these brothers and sisters of Jesus were children of Joseph by a previous marriage. But this is mere hypothesis, without any support in the Gospels and even in opposition to the Gospel of Christ's infancy, according to Matthew and Luke. Jesus, Son of the Virgin Mary, seems to be the sole object of Joseph's solicitude. It would then be rash to go against the Christian sense,

And are not his sisters here with us ? ' And they were scandalized with regard to him. ⁴ And Jesus said to them, ' A prophet is not without honour but in his own country and among his own kinsfolk and in

that shrinks from the opinion that Joseph, whose virginity they greatly honour, was married twice.

Why then speak of the brethen of the Lord, if Christ was an only son ? Because in Hebrew and Aramaic the word cousin does not exist. The word brother or sister is always synonymous with near relative (Gen. 13 : 8 ; 14 : 16 ; 1 Par. 23 : 21-22 ; Lev. 10 : 4 ; 2 Kings 10 : 13).

The number itself of those who are mentioned favours the idea of a somewhat broad kinship. The people of Nazareth mention all those who are related to their countryman. James was surely the first bishop of Jerusalem (Acts 12 : 17) and probably was the same person as James the Apostle (Gal. 1 : 19), son of Alphaeus. This James is associated here with Joses, as he is later on during the Passion. In the latter narrative (15 : 40), James and Joses are mentioned as the sons of a mother different from the mother of Jesus, and that ought to be enough to prove that Mark does not here intend to speak of the sons of Mary.

Joses does not appear in the history of the Church. Jude and Simon were probably another pair of brothers mentioned by an early historian, Hegesippus (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.*, III, xx, 1 and xxxii, 3). Jude was the author of a canonical epistle, and Simon or Simeon the successor of James in Jerusalem.

The last impression of the people of Nazareth, who were so well informed, led them to close their eyes to

his own home.' ⁵ And he could not do any miracles there, only that he cured a few that were sick by laying his hands upon them. ⁶ And he wondered because of their unbelief. And he went through the villages round about teaching.

⁷ And he called unto him the twelve; and he began to send them two and two, and gave them power over unclean spirits. ⁸ And he charged them to take nothing for their journey but a staff only; no bread,

the light. Jesus, instead of finding fault with them, excuses them, alleging the force of prejudice among relatives. Galilee hailed him as a prophet; among the pagans of Decapolis he did not lay claim to this title. Thus he is rejected only by his own. A sad presentiment of the final attitude of the Jews, who were really—in contrast to the Gentiles—his own home and his own kinsfolk. His healing power is not taken away by this want of faith; but, so to speak, it is restrained, for he was wont to favour with a cure only those who asked him with faith. There were indeed some few exceptions. And this want of faith, though somewhat explicable, was such that Jesus marvelled at it, as any other man would have done. But he still continued to offer salvation to the neighbouring villages.

Mission of the Twelve

7-13. The progress of the gospel is humble but constant. The time has come when the Twelve chosen for this work, are associated with Christ's preaching. They will preach, of course, what their Master preaches; so Mark notes it only at the end, when summing up the result of their mission. But, from the outset, that mission was to be announced as a struggle

no scrip, no money in their girdles; ⁹ but [to go] shod with sandals, and do not wear two tunics. ¹⁰ And he said to them: 'Wherever you enter a house, there abide until you depart from that place. ¹¹ And if any place should not receive you, nor listen to you, go ye thence and shake off the dust from your feet for a testimony to them.' ¹² And going forth they preached repentance, ¹³ and cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick and healed them.

against the evil spirits, a struggle which could be brought to a successful issue only on condition that the Apostles keep in view, constantly and exclusively and almost with a kind of obsession, the goal to be attained, without ever yielding to any fear or personal preoccupation. They should take nothing with them: what they need, they will find on the way, if they are received favourably. If they are not, they must go elsewhere.

Some overscrupulous commentators have noted that the staff, allowed in Mark, is forbidden in Luke and Matthew. The essential point is the spirit of the admonition. It is perfectly proper to take a staff in order to go faster; but not so if this is done out of diffidence, or if the staff is not necessary. This little difference itself shows that the Saviour's commands are not inflexible fetters forever inviolable, but a lasting lesson of the detachment needful for apostolic men. They must not seek hospitality with many, to increase their acquaintances or their distractions, nor prolong their sojourn when ill-will is evident.

At the end, Mark (alone) speaks of the anointing of the sick (cf. James 5: 16), a foreshadowing of the sacrament of Extreme Unction.

¹⁴ Now King Herod heard [of Jesus], for his name had become well known, and men were saying : ' John the Baptist is risen from the dead, and therefore the power of miracles works in him.' ¹⁵ But others said, ' It is Elias ! ' And others said, ' It is a prophet,

Herod's opinion about Jesus

14-16. After the mission of the Twelve, which must have stirred the whole country, it is not surprising that at the little court of Herod some concern was shown about Christ's person and miracles. Herod, Antipas by name, was a son of Herod the Great by Malthake. His father had left him Galilee and Perea ; the latter was the country beyond the Jordan, at least the parts of it which were not emancipated from the yoke of the Jews nor subject to his brother Philip, especially the mountains that faced Judea. The Romans did not recognize the title of king which Mark gives him by courtesy, according to the custom of the Semites, who did not know how to translate the title of tetrarch, that is, ruler of one fourth, originally created for certain regions which were divided into four parts. At the court of this diminutive potentate, who had built Tiberias in honour of Tiberius, as his father had built Cæsarea and Sebaste in honour of Augustus, rumours and speculations were rife. Those who were in favour of extraordinary solutions and were still under the influence of John the Baptist's activity, imagined that he had risen from the dead. Others, aware of the Messianic hopes and knowing that Elias, taken away of old in a fiery chariot, was to come down from heaven to enthrone the Messiah, thought that he had already appeared. Those who believed themselves

like one of the prophets of old.' ¹⁶ But Herod having heard of him, said, 'It is John, whom I beheaded, who is risen again.'

¹⁷ For Herod himself had sent and seized John and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip, because he had married her.

¹⁸ For John said to Herod, 'It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife.' ¹⁹ Now Herodias nursed a grudge against him and was eager to kill him, but

the most moderate and the wisest saw in Jesus nothing less than a prophet such as had been sent in the past. Herod, tortured by his guilty conscience and haunted in his sleep by the vision of John's dismembered head, was the one who circulated the former solution, at least if it is correct to read in verse 14 'he was saying.' If one prefers, as we do, the reading 'they were saying,' so as not to accuse Mark of a repetition, then one must say only that Herod accepted that hypothesis, which people would probably not have dared to utter in presence of the murderer, lest he be frightened by the prospect of a divine vengeance.

Death of John the Baptist

17-29. At this juncture Mark, who had not yet spoken of the Baptist's death, informs his readers about it, but in a parenthetical way; and should the thought of a comparison with Jesus have crossed his mind, he must have tacitly contrasted the sadness of John's disciples with the joy of the Apostles of the risen Lord.

John had been cast into prison, as Josephus also testifies, on account of the fear caused by his discourses, which were considered seditious. With those

she could not. ²⁰ For Herod respected John, knowing him to be a just and holy man, and protected him ; and after hearing him, he was much perplexed, and [still] he heard him gladly.

²¹ And a favourable day came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet to his lords and tribunes, and to the chief men of Galilee. ²² And when the daughter of the same Herodias had come in and danced, this pleased Herod and the guests. Now the king said to the maiden, ' Ask of me what thou wilt and I will

princelings, every ardent speech was regarded as revolutionary agitation. Josephus tells us that John's prison was the fortress of Machaerus (now Mekaur), a strong castle built on a mountain to the north of the Dead Sea, above the plain of Moab from which it was separated by a deep ravine. The agitated career of Herod, to-day crowned king, to-morrow flying from his enemies, had taught him how useful such dens could be to safeguard his family and his treasures.

Mark does not mention the place, for his narrative starts in Galilee where Antipas was living after his return from Machaerus. But he states the precise cause of John's disfavour, which the Jewish historian did not care to manifest to the Romans. Antipas had married the daughter of Aretas, king of the Nabatean Arabs, but he had become entangled by the snares of Herodias, a descendant of Herod and the Hasmoneans. She was the wife of one of Antipas' brothers ; Josephus calls him Herod, and Mark calls him Philip. Since the name Herod was almost synonymous with a dynasty, this petty ruler might have had the name of Philip also. If Mark had meant the tetrarch Philip, he doubtless would have given him his title of honour. As Antipas

give [it] thee.' ²³ And he swore an oath to her, 'Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, I will give [it] thee, though it be the half of my kingdom.'

²⁴ And going out she said to her mother, 'What shall I ask?' But she said, 'The head of John the Baptist.' ²⁵ And straightway she went in with haste unto the king and asked him, saying, 'I will that forthwith thou give me upon a dish the head of John the Baptist.' ²⁶ And, struck sad, the king because of his oaths and guests was unwilling to refuse her.

²⁷ And straightway the king sent a soldier of his

had carried off his brother's wife, their union was adulterous; John therefore, the preacher of penance, could not be silent, especially as Antipas had a great esteem for this just and holy man. John's influence was not deep enough to impel the tetrarch to act as duty required; but at least it raised doubts in his conscience. Herodias in her fear and anger watched her opportunity to conquer Herod's last scruples.

According to the fashion of the princes of that time, Antipas held a birthday celebration, the chief part of the festivity being a banquet with music and dancing. Herodias' daughter, whom Josephus calls Salome, appeared as a dancer. She, the issue of Herodias' legitimate marriage, was particularly out of place among these revellers; she, a princess who afterwards became the wife of a tetrarch, was degrading herself into a scenic dancer. Such condescension and the applause which it gained called for a royal favour. The young girl, hardly more than a child, became unconsciously the instrument of her mother's hatred.

guard with orders to bring the head. And he went and beheaded John in the prison, ²⁸ and brought his head upon a dish and gave it to the maiden, and the maiden gave it to her mother.

²⁹ And his disciples having heard of it, came and took away his body and laid it in a tomb.

³⁰ And the Apostles gathered together unto Jesus and related to him all that they had done and all that they had taught. ³¹ And he said to them, ' Come you

The scene so graphically described by Mark has inspired many a masterpiece of painting. Moralists consider it the most famous case of cruelty blending with love of pleasure. John, with his ascetic attitude, his infallible presentiment of God's judgement, his inflexible firmness in warning the chiefs of the people, was naturally designated to be the martyr of righteousness. He was the first to pronounce that great *Non licet*, simple, unemphatic, but firm, which has become the formula of protestation of many a confessor against violence and seduction.

Even in the time of Theodoret (fifth century) the tomb of St. John the Baptist was venerated at Sebastyeh, the ancient Samaria. At that place may still be seen some remains of a church built by the Crusaders ; but the erection of a mosque has made great havoc with them.

Return of the Apostles, and first multiplication of the loaves

30-44. The preaching of the Twelve had increased in Galilee the effect wrought by Christ's activity. Mark is at his very best when he describes these shifting multitudes moving with the alternating flux and reflux.

apart into a desert place and rest a little.' For there were many coming and going, and they had not so much as time to eat. ³² And they went off in the boat unto a desert place [to be there] apart. ³³ And they saw them going away and many understood [where they were going], and ran flocking thither on foot from all the towns, and arrived before them. ³⁴ And on landing, he saw a great multitude, and had compassion on them, because they were 'as sheep not

Finally the eagerness of the crowd conquers. As before (3 : 20), the disciples could not find time to eat. And still Jesus desired to give them a period of rest. This text is often quoted to apostolic workers who feel the need of recovering spiritual strength in solitude and retreat. A very salutary idea indeed. But we must here admire with what condescension the Saviour, instead of arranging events according to his plan, is pleased to rule his conduct according to the circumstances, according to the good which his Father sets before him. In order to tear himself away from the multitudes, he had taken a boat to pass to the opposite shore. And still the multitude by fast walking had outrun the vessel, and thus the object which the Master's kindness had desired for his Apostles was frustrated and he was thus led to attend to the needs of the people. If the starting-point of the boat was Capharnaum, and that of landing was near Bethsaida, as Luke seems to say (9 : 10), the distance was only six or seven miles. In the clear atmosphere of that country, the people living on the north-east shore, seeing Jesus making his way towards them, had time to reach the landing-place and were thronging about him when the boat touched the beach. Jesus was moved with com-

having a shepherd'; and he began to teach them many things. ³⁵ And when the day was now far spent, his disciples came to him and said: 'This is a desert place, and the hour is now past; ³⁶ dismiss them, that they may depart into the hamlets and villages round about and buy themselves something to eat.' ³⁷ But he answered and said to them, 'Give you them to eat.' And they said to him: 'Shall we

passion because this multitude, like docile sheep, had no shepherd but him. Ezechiel had announced that God 'will set up one shepherd over them and he shall feed them' (Ez. 34: 23), his servant David, namely, David's son, or the Messiah. The Master, knowing what he would do later for the multitude, was prolonging his discourse. But the disciples began to be anxious and did not hesitate to remark that this was a desert place and it was now late. They volunteer the very prudent advice that the people be sent to buy themselves something to eat, namely, bread. Bread is always to be had in private houses, even in isolated places and under the tents of nomads, since every family bakes its own bread. The Saviour does not reprove them for their forwardness and takes pleasure in exasperating their human prudence by charging them to feed this multitude. Their answer betrays some impatience. A *denarius* is equal to about seventeen cents; but two hundred denarii in those days represented the salary of two hundred days of work. If Jesus had forbidden his Apostles to take money with them, how could they find such a sum?

However, when the Master takes the situation in his own hands, the disciples obey his orders with docility.

go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give them to eat ? ' ³⁸ But he saith to them, ' How many loaves have you ? Go and see.' And when they had ascertained, they said, ' Five and two fishes.' ³⁹ And he commanded them to make them all sit down by companies, upon the green grass. ⁴⁰ And they sat down in ranks by hundreds and by fifties.

The green grass, merely a graphic detail in Western countries, may indicate in Palestine that it was either winter or spring. From the fact that the disciples do not seem to be anxious about lodgings for the night, we may conclude that it was springtime ; and this view is more in accordance with the remark in St. John's Gospel, that it was near the feast of the Passover (John 6 : 4).

The multitude arranged themselves by families or by clans, thus forming more or less large groups, the numbers fifty and hundred being approximate. Jesus raised his eyes in the attitude of prayer ; and the Church in the Canon of Mass adds this gesture to those of the Last Supper. The blessing dedicates the food to God, that it may be pleasing in his sight. Our Lord himself broke the loaves into pieces and divided the two fishes, thus reserving to himself the miraculous action which multiplied the fragments. It was indeed a miracle, and one of the most extraordinary, since the multitude numbered five thousand men.

If we could have a preference in things divine, we would say that this prodigy is especially precious for us, as both an attestation of the Saviour's compassionate kindness and a foreshadowing of the Eucharist,

⁴¹ Then he took the five loaves and the two fishes and, looking up to heaven, he blessed and broke the loaves, which he gave to the disciples to set before them, and the two fishes he divided among them all. ⁴² And all ate and had their fill ; ⁴³ and they took up the fragments, twelve basketfuls, besides what was over of the fishes. ⁴⁴ And they that did eat of the

that adorable bread distributed every morning to millions of souls. Still, we must not rob the multiplication of its own character : it is not a sacrament at all, the bread here is plain bread. Critics have endeavoured to despoil the event of its miraculous character. The Rationalists offer to explain it by saying that Jesus simply gave an example to the rich, that they might share their food with the poor ; they followed that example, and there was enough for all. Seeing clearly that such a platitude had nothing in common with the Gospel narrative, the mythical school respects the miraculous character of what is narrated but denies that it is a real fact, and says that it was inspired by ancient narratives, especially the account of Eliseus feeding one hundred people with twenty barley loaves (4 Kings 4 : 42-44). Many other fanciful explanations have been suggested : a figure of the Eucharist, the remembrance of a rustic picnic, ancient recollections, etc. There is no limit to their imagination. But none of these singly or in combination could have given rise to Mark's narrative, so positive in affirming the fact and its circumstances, a narrative accepted as truthful by the Church, that heard it from Peter and the other Apostles. John here adds his testimony to that of the Synoptics, as a last echo of the Apostolic tradition.

loaves were five thousand men. ⁴⁵ And straightway he compelled his disciples to embark in the boat and go on before him to the other side, towards Bethsaida, while he himself should dismiss the crowd. ⁴⁶ And after dismissing them, he went up to the mountain to pray. ⁴⁷ And when evening had fallen, the boat was in the midst of the sea and he himself alone. ⁴⁸ And seeing them labouring in rowing, for the wind was against them, about the fourth watch of the night he came towards them walking upon the sea, and he would have passed them by.

Jesus walking on the water

45-52. Here we have a wonderful contrast. A short while before, there was a rush for the landing-place, the multitude eager and noisy, a joyous meal in the open air, enthusiastic acclamations. Now we see Jesus praying alone in the night, the disciples' little boat tossed by the waves, our Lord walking on the lake as a phantom, and the tempest stilled.

The reason why Jesus wished to be alone to dismiss the multitude must have been that suggested by John (6: 14-15). The multiplication of the loaves, a miracle wrought for the sake of the whole people, must have appeared as one of those striking miracles in accordance with what was currently expected from the Messiah, the future King of Israel. The excited multitude wanted to proclaim Jesus King or Messiah. The Apostles might have shared this excitement, whilst Christ, on the contrary, intended to instruct them about the painful character of his mission. He therefore acts with decision and gently constrains them to embark and cross the lake before him in the direction

⁴⁹ But they, seeing him walking upon the sea, thought it was a ghost and cried out ; ⁵⁰ for they all saw him and were troubled. Now straightway he spoke to them and said, ' Be of good heart ; it is I, fear not.' ⁵¹ And he went up to them into the boat, and the wind fell. And they were utterly astonished within themselves ; ⁵² for they had not understood concerning the loaves, or rather their heart was hardened.

⁵³ And having crossed over, they came to land at

of Bethsaida, which surely was on the east side. Perhaps it was in order to meet them, before they would again cross the lake together. But the wind was contrary and the Apostles could not maintain the boat in the direction of their goal. Jesus seeing them toiling hard with the oar (a detail given by Mark alone) wished to give them a proof of his loving kindness, rather than of his power over the waters. But to compel them to recognize and call him to their help, he meant to pass by them, as if he were not willing to join them. This new miracle, after that of the loaves, does not seem to them less striking. Justly so. But Mark implies that they could have inferred clearer consequences about the person of Jesus. Instead, their heart is hardened. Indeed they are not the kind of witnesses whose imagination gets excited and embellishes the facts. They are rather apathetic and consequently less questionable witnesses.

Jesus returns to Gennesareth

53-56. The plain at the north-west of the lake, somewhat south-west of Capharnaum, was called Gennesar. It was of a marvellous, almost incredible

Gennesaret and moored to the shore. ⁵⁴ And when they had left the boat, straightway some people who had recognized him, ⁵⁵ ran through that whole country, and began to carry about on their pallets, those that were sick where they heard he was. ⁵⁶ And whithersoever he entered, into village or town or hamlet, they laid the sick in the market-places and besought him to let them touch but the hem of his garment. And as many as touched it were healed.

CHAPTER VII

¹ And the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gather about him, ² and seeing some of his disciples eat their bread with hands

fecundity, according to Josephus, and consequently densely populated. There must have been some small village by the name of Gennesareth. There it was that Jesus landed. After a day of teaching, cures were wrought in large numbers. The Saviour, moved by the confidence with which they were requesting his assistance, showed himself so prodigal of favours that all those—and there were many—who touched him were healed. This marks the apogee of Christ's action on the inhabitants of Galilee; it was perhaps on the way to Tyre.

Controversy on rabbinic tradition

7: 1-13. We have seen the Pharisees plotting with the courtiers of Herod in order to put Jesus to death (3: 6). Afterwards they disappeared from the scene and then appeared doctors come from Jerusalem (3: 22).

defiled, that is, unwashed— ³ for the Pharisees and all the Jews eat not save only after washing their finger tips, keeping to the tradition of the ancients ; ⁴ and they do not eat what comes from the market save after sprinkling it, and there are many other practices which they have received to observe, washing of cups and bowls and brazen pans— ⁵ so the Pharisees and the scribes ask him, ‘ Why do not thy

We see them now together, probably to seek for a ground of attack, and they imagine they have found it, because they have caught the disciples eating without having washed their hands, and, therefore in their mind, with defiled hands. Mark thought it first necessary to supply some indications in view of his non-Jewish readers. The text, such as we read and understand it, relates to the purity of persons, demanding that one wash himself, either ‘ often ’ (Vulgate) or ‘ washing ’ ‘ the tip of their fingers,’ which would imply a ceremonial washing : the hands being already washed, one washes his finger-tips to accomplish a rite. Then he mentions the purity of articles of food which must be ‘ sprinkled ’ before eating, lest this food had contracted some legal impurity on the market frequented by Gentiles. According to the Vulgate, the text mentions again persons, and the bath that should precede the meal : instead of ‘ without it being sprinkled ’ it would read ‘ without having taken a bath.’ The third precaution concerns cups, bowls, and brazen pans which are to contain food and drink ; many Manuscripts of the Vulgate add even beds destined for the guests. None of these customs is prescribed by the Law. Their origin and development can be traced to the desire of Pharisees going even to

disciples walk according to the tradition of the ancients, but eat bread with hands defiled ? ' ⁶ Now he said to them : ' Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written :

This people honoureth me with their lips,
But their heart is far from me ;
⁷ In vain do they worship me,
Teaching for doctrines precepts of men.

scruple—minutely to preserve an irreproachable external purity. As the other ancient peoples—and as we do to some extent—the Hebrews placed apart certain objects consecrated to God's worship. Those were holy and separated ; the others profane and common to be used by all. To place the latter in contact with holy things would have been wrong since, relatively to God and his saints, they were defiled. The higher the Pharisees wished to ascend in this legal purity, the more they had to preserve themselves from contact with defiled common things ; at least, if such a contact was inevitable one had to purify oneself frequently by washing.—This explains the scrupulosity of the Pharisees.

But the most objectionable feature of these practices was the concentration of religion upon petty observances indifferent in themselves. Isaiah already (29 : 13) had noted and blamed as false the worship offered from the lips and not from the heart, as God had commanded it. Pharisees lost sight of the essential, buried now under a mass of customs originated by this or that rabbi. Even, whilst they would not go to the extent of rejecting God's commandments, they rendered them void by all sorts of ingenious artifices. Take as an instance the divine command to honour

⁸ Leaving the commandment of God, you keep to the tradition of men.' ⁹ And he said to them: 'Well do you make void the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition. ¹⁰ For Moses said, "Honour thy father and thy mother," and, "He that curseth father or mother, let him be put to death"; ¹¹ but you say, if a man say to his father or mother, "Whatsoever of mine might profit thee, let it be *corban*" (that is, "given to God")— ¹² thenceforth you no longer suffer him to do anything for his father or mother,

one's father and mother. They had found an ingenious way to elude the obligation of housing, feeding, and supporting them: A man may simply by an oath or a vow consecrate to the sacred treasury the sum that would have been so useful to those aged parents. It became *corban*, that is, a gift promised to God and hence belonging to him. It was no longer allowed to give it another destination. This use of oaths by way of *corban* had developed to such an extent and was so repugnant to natural uprightness that Tyrians had expressly prohibited them. (Josephus, *Contra Apion.*, I).

The reproach addressed by Jesus to the Pharisees was then perfectly justified. It lifted the discussion to a higher level, questioning the very principle of Pharisaic tradition. Indeed the disciples are excusable for transgressing one of those minute regulations which were so much opposed to the real moral obligations. Of course unimportant actions may be prescribed and it would be wrong to neglect them; but on the condition that they are subordinated to the moral law the accomplishment of which they are to secure instead of hindering it. The Pharisees who have upset this

¹³ making void the word of God by your tradition, which you have handed down; and many such things you do.'

¹⁴ And calling again unto him the crowd, he said to them: 'Hear me, all, and understand! ¹⁵ There is nothing from without the man that entering into him can defile him; but the things which proceed out of the man, those are they that defile the man. ¹⁶ If any man have ears to hear, let him hear!'

¹⁷ And when he was come into the house, away from the crowd, his disciples asked him [the meaning of] the parable. ¹⁸ And he saith to them: 'So are you also without understanding. Do you not perceive that what goes into the man from without cannot defile him, ¹⁹ because it entereth not his heart but his

order by attaching so much importance to valueless external practices, who have jeopardized moral obligations by their casuistry, are certainly not qualified to criticize the disciples of Christ, who neglect a valueless observance to which they themselves attach a ridiculous importance.

True principles regarding purity and defilement

14-23. True religious sentiment is inseparable from morality and gives to the latter the first rank in the practice of life. Such is the theme which Jesus now develops, applying it to the matter of food. He summons the multitude and, somewhat enigmatically, refutes the ceremonialism advocated by the Pharisees. The first part of the principle was easy to understand, in the light of the problem under discussion. Nothing material entering into a man can defile him from a religious or moral standpoint, that is, in the eyes of

belly, and passeth out into the drain ? '—thus declaring all foods clean ! ²⁰ But he said : ' What cometh out of the man, that defileth the man. ²¹ For from within, out of the heart of men, come forth evil thoughts, debauchery, thefts, murders, adulteries, ²² covetings, malice, fraud, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. ²³ All these wicked things come from within and defile the man.'

God he is not defiled. The second part could be explained by the same principle, yet its hidden meaning could be penetrated only with difficulty. So the disciples ventured to ask for an explanation of those words. Christ's decision is perfectly plain and is the rule of all Christians. Still one wonders that it is so plain, and that Jesus had so early proclaimed a principle which not only swept away the rabbinical ordinances, but also abrogated the fundamental distinction made by the Levitical Law between clean and unclean meats. Mark is aware of the far-reaching effect of this decision, and he writes parenthetically, 'making all meats clean.' Jesus really meant the eternal validity of his decision. But he left the future to reveal its full bearing. The only concrete question that had been asked regarded the washing of hands ; it is the only one settled directly. The question of food was not patient of an immediate solution. Any kind of meat, so long as it is prohibited, may become a cause of defilement for the soul, since disobedience has its root in pride which defiles the soul. On the other hand, this distinction of meats had not in itself an eternal validity ; it was to be annulled with the rest of the ceremonial law, rendered useless by the sacrifice of Christ.

²⁴ And rising from thence, he went into the confines of Tyre and Sidon. And entering a house, he wished none to know ; and he could not be hid.

²⁵ And straightway on hearing about him, a woman whose daughter had an unclean spirit came and fell down at his feet. ²⁶ Now the woman was a heathen, of Syrophenician descent ; and she besought him to cast the devil [out] of her daughter. ²⁷ And he said to her : ' Suffer first the children to have their fill ; for it is not good to take the bread of the children and cast it to the dogs.'

The Syrophenician woman

24-30. Nothing indicates the exact place where Christ rebuked the Pharisees. It was in Galilee according to Mark, who now brings us into the borders of Tyre. The Vulgate adds ' and Sidon.' But Tyre was nearer to Galilee than was Sidon, situated further north. Our Lord's journey was an excursion into a pagan land, probably to escape the snares of his enemies, and thus teach the disciples a lesson of prudence for times of persecution. St. Cyprian, so courageous when facing death, had first taken to flight. Another text (Luke 13 : 31 ff.) more clearly expresses Christ's purpose : he had to reserve himself for Jerusalem. No doubt this is why he remained hidden in Phenicia, as the time had not come yet to announce the glad tidings to the heathen. But a certain distressed mother learns of his presence. She is better known as a Canaanite, the name given her by Matthew, who is exceptionally more graphic in this instance. ' Syrophenician ' meant a Phenician of Syria, in contrast to Libyphenicians, or Phenicians of Carthage. This

²⁸ But she answered and saith to him, ' Yea, Lord ; for the dogs beneath the table eat of the children's crumbs.' ²⁹ And he said to her, ' Because of that word, go ; the devil is gone out of thy daughter.' ³⁰ And having come to her home, she found the child stretched upon the bed, and the devil gone out.

³¹ And departing again from the confines of Tyre, he came by way of Sidon to the sea of Galilee, through

heathen woman was aware of the superiority which the Jews arrogated to themselves, and yet she had confidence in Christ's loving kindness. To test her faith, he spoke to her as a rabbi greatly imbued with the privileges of his race might have done. The word ' children ' stands for the Jews ; they sit down at table and are waited upon. The others . . . the woman understood that they were compared to the dogs. With a charming presence of mind and with the exquisite tact which genuine humility so often inspires, the mother is willing to take any rebuke for her daughter's sake and is satisfied with the humble share attributed to her. Her answer touches the divine Master's heart as the faith of an Israelite might have done. He therefore grants to the Gentile the crumbs from Israel's table. The kingdom of God was to be preached first to those to whom it had been promised ; but the day would come when the Gentiles also would sit at the same table.

Return to Decapolis ; cure of a deaf mute

31-37. From the territory of Tyre the Saviour goes to Sidon, one day's journey to the north ; then he comes nearer Lake Tiberias and finally right into the region of Decapolis. It seems that he avoids Herod's

the midst of the district of the Decapolis. ³² And they bring to him one deaf and tongue-tied, and they besought him to lay his hand upon him. ³³ And taking him apart, away from the multitude, he put his fingers into the man's ears, and spitting he touched his tongue. ³⁴ And looking up to heaven he sighed, and saith to him, 'Ephata,' which is, 'Be thou opened!'

³⁵ And straightway the man's ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosened, and he spoke plainly. ³⁶ And he charged them to tell no man; but the more he charged them, so much the more by

territory. In spite of the care he took to remain unnoticed, he was unable to avoid exercising his miraculous power in favour of sufferers for whom his aid was sought. The cure of the deaf man who could scarcely speak, an incident special to Mark, is characterized by the fact that Christ accommodates his gestures to the circumstances of the case of this twofold illness. He puts his fingers in the ears of the deaf man, as if to open them, and touches his tongue with his saliva, saying: 'Be thou opened,' as though the same infirmity paralysed both organs. Under certain circumstances, Jesus willed to place the might of his word above controversy. Here he reveals the efficacious influence of his humanity and the solicitude with which he will apply a special remedy to each of our wounds. He raised his eyes to heaven: his prayer it is that saves us. He sighs: in pity for the sufferer. No other miracle shows him better in the rôle of a kindly physician. Still he took the man aside to perform this miracle; he enjoined him to remain silent about his cure; but, as usual, the command was disregarded. It was fitting for Christ, so humble of heart, not to be

far did they publish it. ³⁷ And they were astounded beyond all measure, and saying, 'He hath done all things well; the deaf he maketh to hear and the dumb to speak.'

CHAPTER VIII

¹ In those days, when there was again a great multitude and they had nothing to eat, calling the disciples he said to them: ² 'I have compassion on the multitude, for—behold now three days—they remain

associated in public opinion with the impostors who posed as Messiahs. This attitude is emphasized from time to time by Mark. Jesus knows that his miracles will not remain secret; but it will be known that he did not seek to derive any advantage from them. In their enthusiasm, the people generalize, as they always do. Jesus was doing exactly what Isaiah had foretold (35: 5, 6).

Second multiplication of the loaves

8: 1-9. Jesus is, it seems, in Decapolis, not far from the lake. This second multiplication of the loaves and fishes, in its general features, bears a close resemblance to the first one. The numbers are different as St. Jerome noted. But if the two narratives were from the pens of the two writers, one might be inclined to conclude that the accounts were of one and the same event, narrated with different details. In fact, it is the same writer, Mark, who (as also Matthew) relates the two miracles. We should, therefore, recognize the reality of two separate miracles. Furthermore,

with me and have nothing to eat, ³ and if I dismiss them fasting to their homes they will faint in the way ; and some of them are come from afar ! ' ⁴ And his disciples answered him, ' How could anyone fill them with bread here in a wilderness ? '

⁵ And he asked them, ' How many loaves have you ? ' And they said, ' Seven. ' ⁶ And he ordered the multitude to sit on the ground, and taking the loaves, and giving thanks he broke, and gave to his disciples to serve out. And they served them out to the multitude. ⁷ And they had also a few little fishes ; and he blessed them and bade these also be served out. ⁸ And they ate and had their fill, and they took up the fragments that remained, seven basketfuls. ⁹ Now they were about four thousand. And he sent them away.

the accounts of them are, of course, sacred inspired texts. It is not to be wondered at that the Saviour repeated a miracle which foreshadows the Eucharist, which is repeated every day. This time he was moved with compassion for a multitude which might faint from hunger ; he himself takes the initiative. Yet it is strange that the disciples were not sufficiently mindful of the first feeding of the multitude to ask the Saviour for a repetition of that miracle. Their answer is evasive ; it is in the form of a question, showing how entirely they relied upon the Master. It must not be forgotten that Christ had never resorted to miracles to supply ordinary needs ; and the only occasion when he did so must not have appeared to them, amidst so many different recollections, so decisive as it does to us who read the Gospel where only a few lines separate this second miracle from the first multiplication of the loaves.

¹⁰ And straightway embarking in the boat with his disciples, he came into the parts of Dalmanutha. ¹¹ And the Pharisees came forth and began to dispute with him ; asking him a sign from heaven, tempting him. ¹² And sighing deeply in his spirit, he said :

The Pharisees ask for a miracle

10-13. Jesus landed on the western shore of the lake, where the Pharisees had their headquarters. The name of the place is not certain. The best reading is 'Dalmanutha,' but the location of that district is unknown. Magdala would be the town of Mary Magdalene, which is now called El Medjel ; but this must be an early conjecture. Magedan is not less doubtful and cannot be identified. At any rate, the name designates a small town. The Pharisees, seeing Jesus land, came forth to meet him with questions, or rather with snares. Since the young teacher pays no attention to the doctors, and is spreading a new teaching, he must prove by signs from heaven that he is sent by God. Of course Christ was really satisfying this exigency : his miracles both rewarded and confirmed faith. The Pharisees demand more, a sign from heaven : for example, some striking manifestation which the whole people could witness. Their purpose was to try him ; in a deeper sense, to tempt him, as Satan had done, by suggesting that he should give up his mission of humility and sufferings and inaugurate a period of glory before the appointed time.

Now, in God's designs, miracles themselves, with their striking import, must allow a share to faith. The challenge from unbelievers to perform a miracle in the presence of scientific bodies must remain unanswered.

‘Why doth this generation seek a sign? Amen I say to you, a sign shall not be given to this generation.’

¹³ And leaving them, he again embarked, and departed to the other side.

¹⁴ And they forgot to take bread, and they had but one loaf with them in the boat. ¹⁵ And he charged them, saying, ‘Take heed; beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the leaven of Herod!’

Christ refuses to act at the bidding of those who tempt him. He sighs, because he deplores so much bad will. Unfortunately, the Pharisees are but too influential with their docile contemporaries. Through them, the whole generation ask for a sign from heaven. This will not be vouchsafed. If they have not recognized the finger of God in the miracles wrought by Christ, would they yield to a miracle wrought at their bidding? And if so, what would be the result? Would they not become a prey to the revolutionary excitement of false Messiahs instead of accomplishing the reformation of their heart by the way of sacrifice? In Matthew and Luke, Christ promises the sign of Jonas, interpreted as referring to his resurrection (Matt. 12: 38-42; Luke 11: 29-32). This is no contradiction of Mark, for the resurrection was not the sign from heaven, such as the Pharisees were demanding.

The leaven of the Pharisees

14-21. When anyone was about to cross the lake for the opposite shore, it was prudent to take bread along: if procured from home or from friends, it was less expensive. And the meal could be eaten in the boat. But the disciples neglected this precaution and had with them only a single loaf, left there by chance,

¹⁶ And they disputed among themselves because they had no bread. ¹⁷ Which Jesus knowing, saith to them: 'Why do you dispute among yourselves because you have no bread? Have you not yet thought nor understood? Is your heart hardened?' ¹⁸ Having eyes, see you not, and having ears, hear you not? And do you not remember ¹⁹ when I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of fragments you took up?' They said to him,

when their attention was called to it by a word of our Lord. The Pharisees were in collusion with the courtiers of Herod. Though the spirit of the two groups was very different, still their influence on the people might be compared to the leaven which raises an insipid and soft mass. This fermentation, a corruption in the physical order, was a symbol of their moral corruption. The disciples were to beware of it, avoiding both the Pharisees' hypocrisy and Herod's cynical inclination for pleasure and ambition. The saying was mysterious; the disciples made no effort to ascertain its meaning. The word 'leaven' brings to their minds the thought of the loaves. They realize their forgetfulness. As usual in journeys, each one throws the responsibility on his neighbour: each declaring that he had depended on the others. But was there sufficient reason for a dispute? Such is not the view of Christ. He had never promised, he does not now promise, to feed them miraculously. But, in case of necessity, they should trust in him. And since they talk about loaves, he reminds them of the two occasions when he fed the multitude. The disciples have not forgotten the minutest circumstances of those two miracles; they are able to quote them. But they had failed to

'Twelve.' ²⁰ 'When [I broke] the seven for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of fragments took you up?' And they said, 'Seven.' ²¹ And he said to them, 'Do you not yet understand?'

²² And they come to Bethsaida. And they bring to him a blind man, and beg him to touch him. ²³ And taking the blind man by the hand, he led him out of the village; and after spitting upon his eyes, laying his hands on him, he asked him, 'Dost thou see any-

perceive the deep meaning of those events. Evidently Mark wishes to emphasize it. Our own failure to understand the supernatural helps us to see how natural this lack of comprehension was on the part of the disciples; but also it forbids our reproaching them.

The blind man of Bethsaida

22-26. Bethsaida ('fish house') was a village on the eastern shore which had become a town (Luke 9: 10) under the name of Julias, in honour of Julia the daughter of Augustus. Christ did not wish to perform a miracle before a public that was probably ill-disposed; he therefore led the blind man by the hand outside of the village. Strange to say, those who brought the blind man would have been satisfied had Christ merely touched him. The miracle is, as it were, tentative. Christ spat upon the blind man's eyes and twice imposed hands upon them. Since the man had preserved in his imagination what trees looked like, it is evident that he was not born blind. His words are very natural, even ingenuous. Very natural, too, is this progressive cure. Yet it is certainly a miracle, although destitute of the features which might seem to emphasize Christ's power. Why

thing ? ' ²⁴ And having begun to see, he said, ' I see men ; for I see them as trees walking.'

²⁵ Then again he laid his hands upon his eyes, and the man saw clearly, and was restored to sight, and could see all things distinctly, even at a distance.

²⁶ And he sent him away to his home, saying, ' Do not even enter the village.'

²⁷ And Jesus went forth with his disciples to the villages of Cæsarea Philippi. And in the way he asked his disciples, saying to them, ' Whom do men say that I am ? '

did Jesus choose to proceed slowly and employ apparently appropriate gestures, when one word would have been enough ? Perhaps it was to emphasize a certain parallelism between bodily and spiritual cures. We say that our eyes are opened, when truth dawns upon our minds. At times, the Saviour dispels the darkness of the soul by a single illumination ; more often, he proceeds by degrees, and it was thus he trained the Twelve. This cure, narrated only by S. Mark and placed between the reproach of the disciples because of their lack of comprehension and Peter's confession, is, as it were, a symbol of their progress towards light.

Peter's confession. Mission of the Messiah

27-33. At the extreme north of the land of Israel was the town of Cæsarea, called Philippi to distinguish it from another Cæsarea on the seacoast. It was built, about the time of the birth of Christ, by the tetrarch Philip, not far from one of the sources of the Jordan, and was adorned with a temple of Pan ; hence the name of Paneas, now Banias. Away from the jealous gaze of the scribes and the sometimes importunate

²⁸ Now they tell him: 'John the Baptist; and others, Elias; and others, one of the prophets.' ²⁹ And he asked them, 'But you—whom do you say that I am?' Peter answering, said to him, 'Thou art the Christ.' ³⁰ And he charged them that they should tell no one about him.

eagerness of the Galilean crowds, Jesus is about to treat with his disciples regarding the question of his mission.

First he asked them what the people thought. The answers are those which were expressed at Herod's court (6 : 14 ff.). Some must have thought that he was the Messiah, as John (6 : 15) clearly suggests. If they did not entertain that idea, it was because Jesus had manifested himself in a way so different from the appearance of a victorious king, as the Messiah was supposed to appear. When his triumph seemed to be an easy one after the first multiplication of the loaves, he had fled. Evidently that could not be conceived of the Messiah. But what do the disciples themselves think? Peter speaks in the name of all, but it is not certain that all had such a decided conviction: 'Thou art the Christ,' that is, the Anointed One, in Hebrew 'Messiah.' Peter's faith, as will be seen, did not penetrate the whole mystery of Christ's mission. At least he had understood that Christ was the Saviour promised to Israel. Jesus had been sent by God to preach and to establish his kingdom. The casting out of the devils clearly showed their defeat and his victory. Jesus, who was bringing souls back to God, was truly the chief of the kingdom of God. Matthew expresses Peter's answer more completely and mentions also the reward promised him by the Messiah. Ancient interpreters thought that Peter in his preaching did not dwell upon

³¹ And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the ancients and the high priests and the scribes, and be put to death, and after three days rise again. ³² And he made this announcement openly. And Peter taking

what would turn to his praise ; hence the silence of Mark, followed by Luke.

Jesus was really the Messiah, since such was the accepted term designating the Saviour whom God was to send. But by 'King,' the Jews meant their king, the avenger of their wrongs, the executor of their reprisals. As it was not expedient to inflame those hopes, Christ enjoined silence. It was more necessary to enlighten them on the rôle of the Son of Man, another name pregnant with hopes, but more apt to accentuate the presentiment of sufferings and humiliations, the common lot of the sons of men. The main feature and the most extraordinary for a Messiah of Israel was that he was to be unrecognized and even expressly rejected by the supreme council of the nation, the Sanhedrin, presided over by the high priest surrounded by the aristocracy of priests and laymen and the prominent teachers. Then, he was to be put to death ; but his resurrection was foretold as the only end befitting the Messiah. That glory, however, cannot assuage Peter's sorrow at the thought of his Master's sufferings. With delicate but presumptuous devotedness, he takes him aside to remonstrate with him, as if the Messiah were lowering the ideal which was to be his. But it was Peter who was wrong. As the lesson was to be useful to all, Peter is rebuked in their presence. The passion is willed by God ; whoever does not understand it, ignores the designs of his wisdom, does not think like

him aside, began to rebuke him. ³³ But he, turning and seeing his disciples, rebuked Peter and said, 'Get thee behind me, Satan; for thou mindest not the things of God, but the things of men.'

³⁴ And calling unto him the multitude together with his disciples, he said to them: 'If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take

him and with him. Such a one takes vain complacency in human aspirations towards grandeur and the joy of success. But God had revealed through Isaiah the painful mission of his suffering servant, a mission useful to mankind, whose sins he takes away by his death.

Following Jesus in the way of salvation

34-38. The doctrinal connection with what precedes is very close. If the Messiah must suffer, the same lot is destined for all his disciples, not only his Apostles, but all who truly wish to take him as their leader. So Mark carefully notes that the discourse was addressed to the multitude. If we suppose that in these remote regions of Cæsarea it is difficult to conceive such crowds in attendance, we will have to conclude simply that the Evangelist places this lesson, given perhaps at another time, where its meaning was best explained. Anyone wishing to follow Christ, must deny himself, treat himself as a stranger, to whom no regard is due and who is not spared at all should he oppose a goal that is being resolutely pursued. Anyone is an obstacle to himself if he hesitates to make the sacrifices required for success. The second condition is to carry the cross. If the leader goes to death, carrying the wood of his gibbet, the disciple must be willing to carry his own cross. We

up his cross, and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever would save his life shall lose it ; and whoever shall lose his life for my sake and for the gospel's shall save it. ³⁶ For what doth it profit a man to gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his soul ? ³⁷ What shall a man give

have here a glimpse of the future, which is not surprising on the lips of Christ ; furthermore, this discourse was not so obscure at a time when death by crucifixion was so frequent. One must, then, risk one's life in order to follow Jesus. But it is also the wisest prescription ; for to lose one's life for him is the best way to secure the true life. In Greek, the same word (*psyche*) designates both 'soul' and 'life' ; hence arises a little difficulty in the translation. The antithesis is first between two lives, an antithesis not expressed, since Jesus speaks only of the true life. In verse 36, the transition from life to the soul is made by the notion of person. To gain the whole world, that is, to accumulate money or extend our power, does not amount to anything if at death life eternal is also lost ; for we lose ourselves when we lose our true soul life, that which is noblest and everlasting in us. Once this life or soul of ours is lost, what can we give in exchange, since death despoils us of everything, and a lost soul cannot redeem itself ? This is the sad fate which seems to be the lot of an adulterous generation, one unfaithful to the alliance made with God. They are ashamed of the Son of Man because he sets before them a path of self-denial so contrary to their ambitions. But the Son of Man, when he returns in his glory, will also be ashamed of them.

Vainly would one claim to enter by the favour of Christ and after him into a sphere of enjoyment created

in exchange for his soul? ³⁸ For he that shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man also will be ashamed of him, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.'

CHAPTER IX

¹ And he said to them : ' Truly I say to you, there are some of those who stand here, who shall by no means taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God

on earth by a striking prodigy. Everyone must side with Christ and his doctrine, by embracing a life like unto his. The reward is in the life beyond ; but, in case of a refusal to embrace such a life, there will be due punishment, when Jesus is invested with his glory.

The coming of the kingdom of God

9 : 1. Between this passage and the preceding one, Mark implies an interval. The preceding verses affirm that the Son of Man is to come in glory as supreme Judge of men, when the time arrives to appreciate the attitude of men towards him. In the present passage Christ says that the kingdom of God will soon be felt, since in their lifetime some standing there will partake of it. He cannot mean the Transfiguration, which takes place six days later ; nor even merely his Resurrection. The destruction of Jerusalem took place before the generation contemporary with Jesus had entirely disappeared. That event indeed indicates very well both the freeing of the infant Church and a powerful impulse given to the kingdom of God. Per-

coming with power.' ² And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them on to a high mountain by themselves apart. And he was transfigured before them ; ³ and his garments became shining, so white as no fuller on earth can make white.

haps, however, the meaning of this text would be as follows : a prediction of Christ's Resurrection followed by the establishment of the Church, in a unique perspective in which the contemporaries seemed to disappear. 'In power' means inner energy rather than outward manifestation.

The Transfiguration

2-8. The Transfiguration took place six days after Peter's confession : this is the only date that Mark has determined, outside of the Passion. This event is the culminating point of his Gospel as far as the knowledge of the Son of God is concerned, for the testimony of Peter is supplemented here by the testimony of God the Father. This event took place on a high mountain which ancient interpreters identified with Mount Thabor. In the time of Christ, on this picturesque belvedere, which dominates southern Galilee, there was a town : but this fact does not preclude the existence of some desert regions. As on the occasion of the raising of Jairus' daughter (5 : 37), the Saviour takes with him only Peter, James and John. He is transfigured, or according to the strength of the original, transformed ; this expression conveys the idea that his glistening radiance comes from some internal principle, not newly acquired, but on this occasion allowed to appear outwardly. The whiteness of his garments is expressed by Mark with the simplicity of a peasant.

⁴ And there appeared to them Elias with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. ⁵ And Peter joining in said to Jesus : ' Rabbi, it is good that we should be here ; and we shall make three tents, one for thee and one for Moses and one for Elias.' ⁶ For he knew not what to say, for they were sore afraid. ⁷ And there

Elias is mentioned before Moses, but he is present only as Moses' companion. Since, according to Scripture (Deut. 34 : 5), Moses really died, the presence of Elias at the Transfiguration is no proof that Elias still lives his mortal life. Both appear and speak because they live in God. The Old Testament, that is, the Law and the Prophets, is present to witness the testimony given to Jesus by his Father, and subsequently to bow in homage before Christ.

Peter's remark is not altogether clear, and the Evangelist does not regard it as very timely. Indeed, it expresses how pleased Peter is to be there. Eager as ever for action, he offers his services. But in Mark, it seems, the meaning is that since the three are engaged in their heavenly conversation, it is fortunate that the Apostles are there to make tents for them ! At any rate, Peter imagines that Christ, accompanied now as he will be henceforth, by Moses and Elias, is about to enter upon his career of glory. In spite of the severe rebuke which he has received (8 : 33), he does not understand the mystery of the Passion. Whilst they were sore afraid, their fear was not a depressing terror, but, as usual, awe at the contact of the supernatural. It became overwhelming when a cloud overshadowed them. God was coming. The sanctuary, when the cloud overshadowed it, was filled with the glory of the Lord (Ex. 40 : 29). The voice which is heard is there-

was a cloud overshadowing them ; and a voice came out of the cloud, ' This is my beloved Son ; hear ye him.' ⁸ And suddenly, looking about, they saw no man but Jesus alone with them.

⁹ And as they came down from the mountain, he charged them to tell nobody what they had seen, save when the Son of Man should be risen from the

fore God's voice, and the words it utters surely go much further than the simple title of Messiah : Jesus is the beloved Son, which means the only-begotten Son. In his relations towards men, he is the Christ ; in his relationship to the Father, he is the Son. Then the cloud disappears ; Moses and Elias are gone. When the three Apostles raise their eyes, they see only Jesus with his ordinary countenance.

Rationalists have seen in that sublime scene but a rendezvous concerted between Christ and some unknown disciples who disappear in the morning haze. Strauss had no trouble in refuting this ridiculous invention. But he attributes to some ' believer of great genius ' the creation of this admirable symbol of the triumph of Christianity over the Law.

A mere symbol ! Mark does not convey that impression at all, and Peter, who doubtless apprised him of the fact, was not particularly satisfied with the rôle which he had filled there. His awkward intervention would suffice to impart to the narrative the character of absolute reality.

Messianic Questions

9-13. Jesus chose his witnesses because the Transfiguration was to remain a secret, even from the other disciples. The prediction of the Passion, so hard to

dead. ¹⁰ And they kept the command, debating among themselves, what that should mean, when he shall be risen from the dead.

¹¹ And they asked him saying, ' Why do the scribes say that Elias must come first ? ' ¹² Now he said to them : ' If Elias then comes first and restores all

believe, would have appeared still stranger after this manifestation of glory. The time to announce it would be after the Resurrection. Unlike so many others, the three Apostles keep Christ's command ; not daring to question the Master, they ask each other what was the meaning of this allusion to his Resurrection. Such is the meaning of the passage as indicated by the context, whether with the Vulgate we read ' When he shall be risen from the dead,' or with the overwhelming majority of Greek manuscripts, ' this rising from the dead.'

Leaving then this point in the indecision of the future, the three Apostles ask another question about what had just happened. According to a suggestion of Malachy (4: 5 or 3: 23), the doctors believed that Elias was to appear before the Messiah, in order to prepare all things for his reign. According to the Jew Trypho, Elias was to anoint the Anointed One (Justin, *Dial.*, 49). Now Elias came only after Jesus and disappeared without doing anything. Had the doctors erred ? No, answers the Master, if you interpret rightly. If it were claimed that Elias must come first and convert the people, how could the Passion of Christ, who had come as the Son of Man, be still possible ? And still it is predicted by the Scriptures. On the other hand, it is true that the Messiah was to have a precursor whose ardent zeal was expressed by the symbolic name of Elias. But was not this pre-

things, how is it written of the Son of Man that he is to suffer many things and to be despised? ¹³ But I tell you, Elias is come and they did to him all they would, as it is written of him.'

¹⁴ And coming towards the disciples, he saw a great multitude about them, and scribes disputing with them. ¹⁵ And straightway the whole crowd on seeing him were struck with amazement, and running to him they saluted him. ¹⁶ And he asked them, 'What is it that you dispute with them?' ¹⁷ And one from the crowd answered him, 'Master, I brought to thee my son, who hath a dumb spirit' ¹⁸ and wheresoever it

cursor also to suffer? The Apostles must have understood what is clear for us, that Jesus spoke of John the Baptist. The prophecies of the Messiah's sufferings are found especially in Isaiah and the Psalms. Holy Writ did not allude to those of John, but had described at length (3 Kings, chaps. 17-19) what Elias had to suffer for justice' sake from an evil woman and a weak king. John, a victim of similar iniquity, was, then, really prefigured by Elias.

The epileptic demoniac

14-29. Here we have a narrative in Mark's most characteristic manner. The miracle is not reduced to an apologetic theme. It is an event with all its details enacted before our eyes. We learn what we are expected to know at the same time as the witnesses do. No history is more like a drama of nature, which does not, as art does, exclude useless elements, but which neglects learned preparations. We are not told, for instance, why the crowd was struck with amazement on seeing the Master coming with the three disciples.

seizeth him, it casteth him down, and he foameth and grindeth his teeth, and becometh rigid. And I asked thy disciples to cast it out, and they were not able.'

¹⁹ Now he answering them, said: 'O unbelieving generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? Bring him unto me.' ²⁰ And they brought him unto him. And the spirit on seeing Jesus, straightway threw the boy into convulsions; and he fell to the ground and rolled about foaming.

²¹ And he asked his father, 'How long time is it since this has happened unto him?'

Did they think that he had gone in some other direction? And what are those scribes doing, of whom not a word will be said? One point, however, is less doubtful; they were probably disputing about the demoniac boy; for his father intervenes immediately, as if he himself had been the cause of the dispute. He had seen the group of disciples and came with his son for the purpose of bringing him to the Master; in his absence, he had recourse to them. The symptoms of the illness are those of epilepsy, but the father attributes these troubles to the influence of a demon supposed to be dumb, because the boy is deprived of speech at the time of the crises. Of course epilepsy is a well-characterized disease and is not ordinarily caused by a demoniacal possession. The man might have been mistaken, like so many others who attributed a sacred character to that illness. But the words of Christ oblige us to believe that, in this case, a demon had taken advantage of the boy's infirmity in order to dominate him the more completely. The situation was a sad one. The father's faith was far from perfect; and it was with defective dispositions that the disciples

²² And he said: 'From childhood, and often it hath cast him into the fire and into water to destroy him. But, if thou canst do anything, help us, having compassion on us.'

²³ And Jesus said to him: 'If thou canst? All things are possible to him that believeth.' ²⁴ Straightway the father of the boy cried out, saying, 'I do believe; help thou my unbelief.' ²⁵ And Jesus, seeing that a large group was about to gather, commanded the unclean spirit, saying to him: 'Thou deaf and dumb spirit, I command thee, go out of him and enter not any more into him.' And it went out, yelling and

attempted to cast out the devil. The scribes regarded this failure merely as an opportunity for taunts and wrangling. Christ's words are less a precise reproach than the sigh of a celestial being obliged to live in surroundings where his blessings are not understood, just as a charitable physician would become indignant when obliged again and again to repeat his advice without being obeyed. So, then, the crisis takes place, such as the description given by the father had announced it. Jesus asks, as a physician would do, and that the seriousness of the malady may be better realized, from what time this has befallen him. This question gives the father a chance to offer a more accurate description of the symptoms, which very naturally he interprets in his own way. The epileptic is in greater danger when near water or fire; but should he fall into them, this does not prove he intended to commit suicide. The failure of the disciples having perhaps shaken his confidence, the hapless father asks Christ to cure the boy—if he can! The Master could not consider this restrictive clause. There was no

throwing the boy into repeated convulsions. ²⁶ And he became as dead, so that they said, 'He is dead.' ²⁷ But Jesus taking him by the hand raised him up; and he arose.

²⁸ And when he was come into the house, his disciples asked him privately, 'Why could not we cast it out?' ²⁹ And he said to them, 'This kind can be cast out by naught save prayer.'

³⁰ And departing from thence, they passed through Galilee; and he would not that any man should know.

³¹ For he was teaching his disciples and saying to them: 'The Son of Man is delivered into the hands of men; and they shall put him to death, and three

question of his power being limited; but to obtain a miracle one must have stronger faith. Then the afflicted father broke into that touching cry, declaring his wish to believe or to believe more strongly, with which Jesus is satisfied, because a crowd was running up. This is an unclean spirit, like all the demons that torture men; and it is also deaf and dumb. It is cast out for ever. The cure is clearly complete. The disciples, who were usually more successful, resent their own failure. That kind of demon could be cast out by naught but prayer. Still Jesus did not pray; his power is so much like God's power. To 'prayer' the great majority of manuscripts add 'fasting,' perhaps from the tradition of the monks.

Second prediction of the Passion

30-32. If he were to pass through Galilee, Jesus might encounter large multitudes. He avoids them, because he is now devoting himself entirely to the training of the Twelve. So he again takes up the lesson

days after being put to death he shall rise again.' ³² But they understood not the word, and were afraid to ask him.

³³ And they came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house he asked them, 'What were you discussing on the way?' ³⁴ But they held their peace; for on the way they had discussed with one another on primacy. ³⁵ And sitting down he called the twelve and saith to them, 'If any man would be

of suffering, a lesson most needful and opportune for them, since he is now directing his steps toward Jerusalem.

Preferment

33-37. At this point Mark begins an instruction which continues to verse 50. The themes are different and consequently are not logically connected; they are not parts of the same discourse. And we cannot affirm that the circumstances are strictly reproduced, except with regard to the question asked by the Apostle John (37-40), for the themes follow each other according to a certain rhythm. Such a juxtaposition of thoughts rather than a blending of them in one context is calculated to preserve them more exactly and helps the memory to retain their sequence.

The question of preferment is introduced in Mark (alone) in the most natural way. As a wise educator, Jesus allows his disciples a notable freedom in manifesting their tendencies, so as to give them appropriate advice afterwards. It may have been owing to Peter's prominence in his confession, or because of the Master's private talk with his three disciples; be this as it may, on the way they had discussed with one another which

first, he should be last of all and minister of all.' ³⁶ And taking a little child, he sat him in their midst, and having embraced him, he said to them: ³⁷ 'Whosoever receiveth one such child because of my name, receiveth me; and whosoever receiveth me, receiveth, not me, but him who sent me.'

³⁸ John said to him: 'Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and we forbade him, because

of them would be greatest in the future kingdom. When they are questioned by the Saviour, deep shame keeps them silent. Christ does not wish to enter into the discussion nor does he deny the principle of the hierarchy. But if any of them wishes to be greater, it must be doubtless in order to become more useful; selfish ambition does not enter into the prospect of their activity in the kingdom. Therefore they must begin by making themselves the last of all and by ministering to all. To enforce this lesson, Jesus takes a little child and puts his arm around it (Mark alone), the more expressively to show the love he has for the little and the simple ones. This child is a symbol of those little ones who will present themselves in his name, the most humble of those whom the Twelve will have to serve. To receive them, that is to take care of them, is to receive Jesus; and he who receives Jesus receives his Father.

How to use the name of Christ

38-40. John, the son of Zebedee, is struck by this phrase, 'in my name.' Must such regard be shown to those who act in Jesus' name? Must they not also join his company and follow him as disciples? This is what the disciples had thought, when they saw a

he is not following us.' ³⁹ But Jesus said : ' Forbid him not ; for there is no man that doth a miracle by virtue of my name and can soon speak ill of me ; ⁴⁰ for he that is not against us is for us.

⁴¹ ' And whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink because you are Christ's, amen I say to you, he shall not lose his reward. ⁴² And whosoever shall scandalize one of these little ones that believe, it were

stranger using the name of Jesus in making exorcisms. Jesus is not so intolerant. He who performs a miracle in his name may not yet be in the best dispositions towards him ; but this striking success is calculated to convince him and to win him. In such case this saying is true : ' He that is not against us is for us.' But the opposite situation might occur, when one would have to say : ' He that is not with me is against me ' (Matt. 12 : 30 ; Luke 11 : 23).

Charity towards the disciples

41-42. Jesus resumes the sequence of his discourse, which had been interrupted by John. He was speaking of the merit of those who receive little ones in his name. Yes, even if the service rendered is nothing more than giving a glass of water to a thirsty disciple. On the other hand, the punishment will be terrible for anyone who scandalizes these humble believers typified by the child. The *mola asinaria* is a big millstone hollowed into the shape of a bowl. Another stone, in the shape of an inverted cone, is fitted to it ; it is turned by an ass and grinds the grain thrown between the two stones. The lower stone could be fastened to a man's neck to drown him ; and this was done occasionally (Suet., *Aug.* 67). Scandal is the more serious when it comes

better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea.

⁴³ ' And if thy hand scandalize thee, cut it off ; it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire. ⁴⁵ And if thy foot scandalize thee, cut it off ; it is better for thee to enter into life lame, than having two feet to be cast into hell. ⁴⁷ And if thine eye scandalize thee, pluck it out ; it is better for thee with

from persons in higher positions. Herein is an additional reason for not desiring the first rank.

Scandal

43-48. One may scandalize, that is be a stumbling-block to others, either by word or by example. But one may also be a victim of scandal. Therefore every occasion of sinning must be avoided ; even if it be necessary to renounce our inmost feelings, to part with a person most dear to us, to lose our most precious possessions. All that is expressed by a kind of parable. Nothing is dearer to us than the members of our body, the hand, the foot, the eye . . . nothing but life itself, or rather, as Jesus said, life in the Kingdom of God. Those members should be sacrificed, if necessary ; not, however, in the literal sense. The loss of one eye, for instance, would not prevent bad desires entering our soul through sight ; the loss of both would not suffice to tame concupiscence. Besides, no one has any right to mutilate himself. The meaning is symbolical, or rather parabolical, with no precise allusion to the rôle of each member. To life, namely, eternal life in the Kingdom of God, the life beyond, is opposed Gehenna. It was originally the name (*Ge-hinnom*) of a valley near

one eye to enter into the kingdom of God, than having two eyes to be cast into hell, ⁴⁸ where "their worm dieth not and the fire is not extinguished." ⁴⁹ For every man shall be salted with fire. ⁵⁰ Salt is good ; but if salt become unsavoury, wherewith shall you season it ? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.'

Jerusalem where children had been sacrificed to Moloch by passing through fire. In Gehenna 'their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched,' as in Isaiah (66 : 25).

Salt

49-50. Verse 49 is difficult, even without the words added by the Vulgate, '*Et omnis victima sale salietur*,' 'And every victim shall be salted with salt.' Does it mean that he who has not made the necessary sacrifices shall be salted with fire ? But then why 'all' ? It may mean : some in the purifying fire of self-denial, the others in the avenging fire of punishment. Or perhaps, those who wish to be preserved from spiritual corruption shall be salted by fire. Thus, this verse is in keeping with the context. This is the only admissible meaning, if the addition of the Vulgate is accepted, for a reprobate is not a victim (offered to God). One must be consumed by the fire of self-sacrifice, which purifies and preserves as salt does.

This mention of salt introduces another admonition. Salt which loses its saltiness is useless. It must be preserved in its integrity. This can be done only by love of God, the principle of the necessary sacrifices : and this charity will normally be practised towards one's neighbour by preserving peace.

CHAPTER X

¹ And rising up thence he came into the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan ; and multitudes again flocked unto him, and again he taught them, as he was accustomed.

² And Pharisees coming to him, asked him, tempting him, ' Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife ? '

³ But he answering, said to them, ' What did Moses command you ? ' ⁴ And they said, ' Moses permitted us to " write a bill of divorce and to put her away." '

Journeying towards Judea and Perea

10 : 1. For a long time, especially after the second multiplication of the loaves (8 : 10), Christ seemed to avoid the crowds and to devote himself exclusively to the training of the Twelve. Perhaps it was also to avoid the excitement of the Galileans which might have exasperated Herod. Now he is going towards Judea and Perea, the land beyond the Jordan. This is all that Mark says ; he does not enable us to trace Christ's itinerary with any precision.

The question of divorce

2-12. Did the Pharisees know or even suspect Christ's doctrine on marriage ? At any rate, when they question him, it is with the intention of placing him in contradiction with the Law of Moses. Deuteronomy (24 : 1) implied a certain principle based on Semitic customs—a principle accepted in Islam—that a man had a right to repudiate his wife for any of the reasons sanctioned by custom ; but it commanded him to give her a ' bill of divorce,' that is, an attesta-

⁵ Jesus said to them : ' Because of the hardness of your heart he wrote you that precept. ⁶ But from the beginning of creation " male and female he made them. ⁷ Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother, and the two shall be one flesh " : ⁸ so that they are no longer two, but one flesh. ⁹ What God, then, hath joined together, let no man put asunder.'

¹⁰ And in the house the disciples asked him again on this matter ; ¹¹ and he saith to them : ' Whosoever

tion that he was giving up all his rights with regard to her. This regulation protected the interests of the wife and authorized her to take another husband. The wife herself had no right to ask for a separation ; all she could do was to cause her husband to find it to his interest to repudiate her. The question of the Pharisees is well put : the question is not that of divorce provoked by one of the parties, but the right that the man has to repudiate his wife. Jesus, perceiving their design, in turn asks them a question.

A modern jurist would answer : Moses did not command divorce, but presupposed the permission of putting away one's wife and regulated the use of this right. But the Pharisees, according to the exegetical jurisprudence of the time, had to quote a text of Moses. They cite Deuteronomy very correctly, but they mix up everything, as if to prescribe the writing of a bill of divorce in case of repudiation was the same thing as to prescribe divorce. Jesus goes deeply into the matter. Divorce was tolerated by the lawgiver only because he had abandoned all hope of bringing Israel up to the practice of marriage in its perfection. Here (verse 5) the true lawgiver, who is God, takes the place of Moses whose text, however, is quoted as expressing God's will.

putteth away his wife and marrieth another, committeth adultery against her : ¹² and if the wife put away her husband and be married to another, she committeth adultery.'

¹³ And they were bringing little children unto him that he might touch them ; and the disciples rebuked

The purpose of the distinction of sexes is their union ; and this union when consummated is the principle of the constant unity of their relations. Conjugal union creates a new kinship, no less indissoluble than family ties. This is God's intention, against which no human order could prevail. Such was the institution of marriage at creation. And it is as such that Jesus purposes re-establishing it.

The disciples do not dare say anything publicly. But in the house, where they were lodging for the night, they question Christ on a point which must have appeared to them derogatory to the husband's rights. Christ answers with an absolute rule, which he formulates in words that place the wife on a footing of equality with the husband, settling thereby the question of divorce as formulated by the Roman mode of living, and such as it was to be formulated in the future. There is no doubt about Christ's thought ; even independent critics admit that it is well expressed by Mark. It is from Matthew's texts that difficulties have arisen, texts and difficulties irrelevant to our purpose.

Blessing little children

13-16. ' And they were bringing little children unto him.' ' They,' namely, mothers desiring him to touch them and thus be a source of good fortune to them.

those [that brought them]. ¹⁴ But Jesus saw it, was moved to indignation, and said to them: 'Suffer the little children to come unto me, forbid them not! For of such is the kingdom of God. ¹⁵ Amen I say to you, whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God like a little child, shall never enter it.'

¹⁶ And he embraced them, and laying his hands upon them, he blessed them.

¹⁷ And as he was going forth on his journey, a certain man ran up, knelt before him, and asked him, 'Good

The disciples think Jesus has more important interests to attend to or that he is annoyed by this intrusion. Jesus is moved to indignation—as Mark, alone of the Synoptics, remarks—by this conduct; he loves children and those who resemble them. Using the expression 'Kingdom of God' first with the meaning of divine invitation and then in the sense of Kingdom to which one is invited, he indicates the best way to answer the invitation and enter the Kingdom: like a child who, at the beckoning of a well-known friend, runs and throws itself in his arms. Then, to go even beyond the pious desire of these mothers, not only does he touch the little children, but he blesses them, folds them in his arms (Mark alone), and lays his hands upon them. Was not this laying on of hands the beginning of more than one apostolic vocation? An ancient tradition designates St. Ignatius of Antioch as the child that had been embraced and carried by Jesus (9 : 36).

A vocation thwarted by riches

17-22. This episode is narrated by Mark in his graphic manner; we lose sight of the writer, who lets the facts speak for themselves. When Jesus was about

Master, what shall I do that I may receive life everlasting? ' ¹⁸ Jesus said to him: ' Why callest thou me good? No one is good but God alone. ¹⁹ Thou knowest the commandments: " Do not kill, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness," do not defraud, " honour thy father and thy mother." ' "

²⁰ And he said to him, ' Master, all these I have kept from my youth.' ²¹ And Jesus looked on him

to depart, a stranger comes running up as if afraid of being too late. In his admiration for the kindness which Christ had just shown, he prostrates himself, eager and breathless, before Jesus, after the manner of those disciples who kissed the knees of the rabbis. He calls him ' Good Master,' an unknown title, and he interprets his preaching of the Kingdom of God and of life by the expression ' life everlasting,' which, though known by Judaism, was much less used then than now.

Jesus answers very appropriately. The title ' Good Master ' was flattering. Christ refers all honour to God, without telling this man what his exact relationship was with his Father. His remark might indeed have been uttered by any man ; it is not out of place on the lips of the Son of God, who came to bring men to God. Should the newcomer have accepted the invitation to discipleship, the divine Master would have spoken to him as he had just spoken to others (9 : 37). After this brief reference to God's rights, Christ passes immediately to the commandments concerning our neighbour. He does not ask any question about the first commandment. Indeed, who could say that he loves God as he ought? The duties towards our neighbour are the

and loved him, and he said to him: 'One thing is wanting unto thee; go, sell all thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.' ²² But he was struck sad at the saying, and he departed grieved, for he had great

touchstone; they are enunciated here almost as formulated in the Decalogue (Ex. 20: 13 ff.; Deut. 5: 17 ff.), without servile adherence to the letter. 'Do not defraud' was not written in the Law, but flowed from it; and a rich man, less tempted to steal, was more exposed to defraud without scruple by not taking the necessary pains with his inferiors. The man answers that he has been correct on those points, even from his youth. Matthew says that he was young; the recalling of the fourth commandment would apply very well to a young man. Often a man still young speaks of his youth as though it were in the past. Christ's glance penetrates into that soul, and he loves him. Yet his love is about to be frustrated. Touching details of this sort are met with only in Mark. The young man's reply was not marked with the self-satisfaction of the Pharisee; it was the ingenuous expression of an upright conscience. The Master truly so good, calls to himself this man of good will. Aware of the weak point, he points it out clearly and, knowing that it is hard for a rich man to give up his possessions, he adds with gentle kindness: 'Thou shalt have treasure in heaven.'

The young man's face falls as when on a fine day a cloud veils the sun, and we learn that he had great possessions. He went away, and if his sadness was perhaps the beginning of a regret, it may also have been a gloomy renunciation of the hope of salvation.

possessions. ²³ And Jesus looking round about, said to his disciples, ' With what difficulty shall they that have riches enter the kingdom of God ! ' ²⁴ And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus again answering, saith to them : ' Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God ! ' ²⁵ It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.'

²⁶ And they wondered the more, saying among themselves, ' But who then can be saved ? ' ²⁷ Jesus looking on them, saith, ' With men it is impossible, but not with God ; for " all things are possible with God." '

But the words which were fruitless with him, have become in the course of ages an efficacious invitation to the most complete renunciation.

Danger of wealth

23-27. Mark then relates with the naturalness and life of conversation the words of our Lord and of his disciples. The Master's remark is the moral of the episode. Perhaps the disciples imagined that the wealthy were in a better position to be saved, since it was easier for them to choose their food, to pay the tithes, and to give alms. But it is just the reverse. Some have proposed to replace ' camel ' by ' cable,' or the ' eye of a needle ' by the ' Needle Gate.' But to no purpose ; it is simply an Oriental paradox. The Talmud speaks of ' an elephant passing through the eye of a needle,' as of an impossible thing. But nothing is impossible to God. With his help, and of course, by attaching himself to God, and not to the goods of this earth, a rich man can be saved.

²⁸ Peter began to say to him, 'Behold, we have left all things and have followed thee.' ²⁹ Jesus said : 'Amen I say to you, there is no man who hath left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands for my sake and for the sake of the gospel, ³⁰ who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands with persecutions ; and in the

Reward promised to those who have left all things

28-31. Peter seems to solicit an answer, though merely stating the case of the disciples. For, after all, if they had left all things, they had not given up great wealth. Jesus' reply states a general principle. Renunciation will be rewarded. To high-minded men is it not harder to abandon their parents than to give up wealth ? The essential point is that this renunciation be made for the sake of Christ. The gospel comes next, as if preaching especially demanded this disentanglement from earthly things. The categories of goods sacrificed for Christ are not here arranged according to a gradation or hierarchy, but rather express the variety of circumstances in which we have to give up what is ours. The reward is a hundredfold in the present time, that is, in the nascent community where land and houses will be owned in common, where spiritual relationships will take the place of those of nature, but with persecutions in store for the most faithful disciples. Such is indeed the fate of those who have left all things for Christ ; even to the extent of provoking a somewhat vulgar envy : ' Make a vow of poverty, and you will not lack anything.' But persecutions decreed by special laws will not be wanting

world to come life everlasting. ³¹ And many that are first shall be last, and many that are last shall be first.'

³² Now they were on their way going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking in front of them; and they were bewildered, whilst those who followed were afraid. And taking again the twelve, he began to tell them what things were about to befall him: ³³ 'Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of man shall be delivered to the chief priests and to the scribes. And they shall condemn him to death and shall deliver him up to the Gentiles; ³⁴ and they shall mock him and spit upon him, and they shall scourge

either. As to the future, there is hope of eternal life; and to that decisive change of state applies the final saying. Those who have left all things are, of course, the last here below; but they will be first, namely, in the first ranks, in life everlasting; and the opposite will be true of those who have been first here on earth.

Third prediction of the Passion

32-34. Mark's text then abruptly places us on the road to Jerusalem. He alone sketches for us, in very sober lines, the picture of Christ walking alone while behind him the firmest of his Apostles are disturbed, and the others are frightened. The Master deems it proper to warn his disciples of what is in store for him, the consequences of which will affect them also. It was not reassuring for them, but it enabled them to choose, and settled them in their faith, when they came to realize the twofold fulfilment of this prediction of trials followed by glory. This prediction is clearer

him and put him to death ; and after three days he shall rise again.'

³⁵ And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, approached him and said to him, ' Master, we desire that thou do for us whatsoever we are to ask of thee.'

³⁶ But he said to them, ' What would you that I should do for you ? ' ³⁷ And they said to him, ' Grant us that we may sit one on thy right hand and one on thy left, in thy glory.' ³⁸ Jesus said to them : ' You know not what you ask for. Can you drink of the chalice whereof I am to drink ; or be baptized with

than the preceding ones, especially concerning the Gentiles and their cruel and ignominious treatment of Christ.

The request of Zebedee's sons

35-40. According to Matthew, it is the mother of James and John who presents the request. A mother's ambition will do such things ; but Matthew implies that her sons had suggested that bold request. They are aware that they are asking something difficult and they beg Christ to promise them the favour they are about to mention. At the very time when their Master has just spoken of his Passion as a necessary condition of his glory, they seek the first two places. So he recalls them to the reality of the situation. The chalice could be an image of joy, but also of bitterness (Ps. 74 : 9, etc.), and the question which our Lord asks them clearly implies—not to mention the circumstances—that this chalice would be hard to drink. ' Baptism ' is a word transcribed from the Greek ; it was sanctioned by usage. It means immersion. We say more aptly that we are immersed in misfortune than in happiness.

the baptism wherewith I am to be baptized ? ' ³⁹ They said to him, ' We can.'

And Jesus said to them : ' Of the chalice whereof I am to drink, you shall drink, and with the baptism wherewith I am to be baptized, you shall be baptized ; ⁴⁰ but to sit on my right hand or on my left is not mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared.'

⁴¹ And the ten hearing, began to be indignant about

The courage of the two brothers is accepted by the Saviour. James indeed was first of the Apostles to be martyred. But how was John associated with the passion of his Lord ? Ancient interpreters, realizing the vagueness of the prediction, thought it was fulfilled when John was plunged into a caldron of boiling oil, according to a tradition re-echoed by Tertullian (*De praescr.* 36). For it is certain that John did not die a martyr. The ardour of some radical critics in vindicating this honour for him is certainly a strange phenomenon which will puzzle the critics of the future.

Evidently the two brothers will have the reward of heaven, if they accept the chalice. But our Lord does not agree to promise them the first two places. In the kingdom of God, which is life everlasting, ranks are assigned by an eternal predestination. It does not belong to the Messiah during his earthly career to change anything of this.

Authority must be service

41-45. The Messiah had another task to fulfil. First the regrettable example of the sons of Zebedee

James and John. ⁴² And Jesus having called them unto him, said to them: ' You know that they that pass as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones domineer over them. ⁴³ But with you it must not be so. Nay, whosoever would become great among you shall be your servant ; ⁴⁴ and whosoever would be first among you should be the slave of all. ⁴⁵ For the Son of man also came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'

must be a lesson to the others. Life everlasting was mysterious ; but the present life was to be organized. The Twelve would have to exercise authority upon earth, but not as understood by those whose power is only an ephemeral appearance and who nevertheless are eager to dominate as if they were masters and to exercise authority in an arbitrary manner. Among the disciples of Christ he who holds authority must be the servant of all. This admirable idea of power penetrates, though slowly, even into human societies ; it is a rule accepted by the Vicar of Christ when he styles himself ' Servant of the servants of God.' It is the law taught by Christ, because it is the law presiding over his own mission. He came to serve. And what service ! If a master is held captive for the lack of ransom, a servant's duty is to free him by taking his place, even though his own life must be the ransom. So Jesus will give his life instead of the others really condemned to death, and consequently for the sake of the others. The Greek text says : ' in the stead of many ' ; but this expression does not exclude anyone. The contrast is between Jesus and the others, namely, the rest of mankind.

⁴⁶ And they came to Jericho. And as he was going out of Jericho with his disciples and a large crowd, the son of Timeus, Bartimeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the wayside. ⁴⁷ And on hearing that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, ⁴⁸ 'Son of David, Jesus, have pity on me.' And many rebuked him that he might hold his peace. But he cried out a great deal more, 'Son of David, have pity on me.' ⁴⁹ And Jesus stopping said, 'Call him.' And they call the blind man, saying to him, 'Be of good heart; arise, he calleth thee.' ⁵⁰ And casting off his cloak, he leaped up and came to Jesus. ⁵¹ And Jesus answered him and said, 'What wilt thou that I do for thee?' The blind man said to him, 'Rabboni, that I may see.'

Blind Bartimaeus

46-52. Here we have another narrative in which all the details are true to life. Jesus and those accompanying him were leaving Jericho, the last stopping-place before Jerusalem. Though Mark does not explicitly say so, we feel that the large crowd following our Lord regarded him enthusiastically as the Messiah. A blind beggar—Mark gives his name—makes bold to appeal to Jesus by the title of Son of David, the most popular appellation of the Messiah King. The crowd tries to make the beggar keep quiet, not because they are opposed to this homage being rendered to Christ, but because it is customary to silence beggars, who ordinarily are noisy and importunate. What was this one asking for? Christ wishes to know it from him. The beggar flings away his cloak that he may run the faster. He naively expresses his wish, instead of remaining silent and implicitly trusting Christ. He is

⁵² And Jesus said to him, 'Go, thy faith hath healed thee.' And straightway he saw, and followed him on the way.

CHAPTER XI

¹ And when they were drawing near to Jerusalem, as far as Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples ² and said to them : 'Go into the village which is over against you, and straightway upon entering it you shall find a colt tied, on which no man ever yet sat ; loose it and bring it.

rebuked for making such an outcry. But the Saviour takes account only of his faith ; and the recovery of his sight places him in the way of salvation.

Triumphal entry into the Temple

11 : 1-11. From Jericho to Jerusalem is not more than five or six hours' walk. The old road leads to the summit of the Mount of Olives, nearer to Bethphage ('house of figs') than to Bethany ('house of affliction'). Bethphage was nearer Jerusalem, but probably situated at the top of the hill, whilst Bethany was to the left on the southern slope. Thus we can understand why Bethany, though closer to Jericho, is mentioned only after Bethphage. The 'village over against you' is rather Bethphage than Bethany, which they had already passed. The word '*Hozanna*' is taken from Psalm 118 (verse 25), and means 'Oh save !' It had in time come to be merely a joyous acclamation, as 'Glory, victory !' The rest of the narrative is quite clear. But the question arises, why Jesus, who always avoided external pomp, accepts and almost invites

³ And if any man say to you, ' Why do you this ? ' say ye : ' The Lord hath need of it, and will at once send it back hither.' ⁴ And they went and found a colt tied outside a door, in the street ; and they loosed it. ⁵ And some of the bystanders said to them : ' What do you, loosing the colt ? ' ⁶ They said to them as Jesus had said; and they let them go. ⁷ And they brought the colt to Jesus, and they cast their cloaks upon it, and he sat upon it. ⁸ And many spread their cloaks upon the road and others branches, which they had cut from the fields. ⁹ And they that went before and they that followed cried out : ' Hosanna ! Blessed

this outburst of Messianic enthusiasm. Most likely because it was part of his mission to present himself as the Messiah, so that the Jews could not allege that he gave them no chance to recognize him as such. He therefore chose an undeniably Messianic triumph, since it was the fulfilment of a clearly Messianic prophecy (Zach. 9 : 9), but also a very humble triumph. In exaggerated comment on the magnificence of this triumph, it is sometimes said that in the East an ass is considered a noble riding animal. The fact of the matter is that the prophet's description of this humble procession was disconcerting to the rabbis. They had decided that it meant a kind of substitute for a triumphal march, in case the Israelites should not be worthy to see the Messiah coming down from the clouds of heaven. (*Le Messianisme* . . ., p. 227). Jesus therefore knew how to reconcile what was demanded by his title with what satisfied the humility of his heart. His triumph is an outburst of provincial joy expressed with the sincerity and simplicity of country folks. This humility showed plainly that he was not coming to

is he that cometh in the name of the Lord ! ¹⁰ Blessed the kingdom of our father David that cometh ! Hosanna in the highest ! ' ¹¹ And he entered into Jerusalem, into the temple ; and having looked round about upon all things, as it was now late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

¹² And the next day, when they came out from Bethany, he was hungry. ¹³ And perceiving afar off a fig-tree having leaves, he came to see if perhaps he might find anything on it. And when he was come to it, he found nothing but leaves ; for it was not the

found a temporal kingdom. The peaceful aspect of this crowd spreading out their cloaks instead of rushing to arms must have reassured the vigilance of the Romans. None the less, the contrast of this triumph with the Passion scenes is very striking. The people had expressed their judgement ; they revoked that decision.

The barren fig tree

12-14. That evening, Jesus retired to Bethany with the Twelve. There he received hospitality during the first days of the week. In the morning he returned to Jerusalem, distant about fifteen stadia according to John (11 : 18). What Christ does in the matter of the fig tree is somewhat strange. But we must not forget that such is often the case with symbolic acts. If it had been June, Jesus might have expected to find ripe summer-figs, though the usual time for figs is August and September. But at the time of the Passion, the fig tree could have had only small figs unfit to eat, and leaves. This does not matter. Jesus' purpose was to impress his disciples by a gesture the import of which they did not grasp at first. Mark says bluntly that it was not the

time for figs. ¹⁴ And answering, he said to it, 'Never more may any man eat fruit of thee!' And his disciples heard.

¹⁵ And they came to Jerusalem. And entering the temple he began to cast out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple; and he overthrew the tables of the money-changers and the seats of them that sold the doves, ¹⁶ and he suffered not that any man should pass through the temple carrying burdens; ¹⁷ and he taught them and said: 'Is it not written, "My house shall be called a house of

season for figs. May it not be that the Evangelist makes this remark by way of relieving the fig tree of blame, as if it could have been guilty and responsible?

Christ expels the sellers from the Temple

15-19. Matthew and Luke have placed this scene immediately after the arrival of Jesus at Jerusalem, on the day of the Palms. If Christ had on the first day observed these abuses in the Temple, why had he not repressed them? And how could they have passed unperceived? Although the grouping of facts, as we have it in Matthew and Luke, may be natural enough, the different arrangement in Mark must be due to some precise remembrance of his own. Mark alone has recorded a characteristic feature: the Temple enclosure was being used as a short cut by men laden with tools and other burdens. But the most serious irreverence was the trafficking that was taking place in the Temple.

First of all, there was buying and selling of sacrificial victims, such as doves which are explicitly mentioned. But very probably the Temple at Jerusalem, like that at Palmyra, was used as an agora or public market,

prayer for all the nations?" But ye have made it "a den of thieves." "

¹⁸ And the chief priests and the scribes heard of this, and they sought how they might destroy him; for they were afraid of him, because all the multitude were in admiration at his teaching.

¹⁹ And when evening was come, they went forth outside the city. ²⁰ And in the morning, as they

Shops were installed there, as they were around the sides of the Roman forum. Pilgrims who, when advancing over the hills of the Holy Land, sighed for the House of God, the dwelling-place of the divine presence, must have been painfully surprised, upon reaching the sacred precincts, by the noisy commerce; and most likely they were cheated in their pious purchases. Christ is filled with a just anger and expels these desecrators, recalling Isaiah's prophecy. It was fulfilled, since the Roman emperors caused holocausts to be offered up in Jerusalem. But the essential point was that the Temple was a house of prayer, and these traffickers were desecrating it.

The chief priests are displeased because of this trespassing on their right to police the holy place: the scribes, too, because the crowd liked a teaching that was not theirs. They must put to death this Galilean who imperils their domination, coming even into the sanctuary of the nation.

The withered fig tree

20-21. This time again Matthew condenses the incident of the fig tree. According to Mark, it is only on the following day the disciples notice that the tree is withered. Another detail special to Mark is that

passed by, they saw the fig-tree was withered away.

²¹ Then Peter remembering, said to him, ' Rabbi, see, the fig-tree which thou didst curse is withered.'

²² And Jesus answering, saith to them: ' Have

Peter is the one who calls attention to the fact. In the absence of any authorized interpretation, there may be some rashness in asserting what the fig tree represents. Yet we cannot help thinking that the meaning may be this: Whosoever does not offer to the Saviour the works that he expects from him, will be severely punished. Of course the tree, being without free will and responsibility, could not be guilty. But might not the Saviour, who wrought so many miracles out of kindness, perform one to teach us to fear his justice? And is it not touching that for such purpose he chose a tree rather than a human being? This fig tree did incur the fate with which the fig tree of the parable in Luke (13: 6-9) was threatened. From the circumstances the disciples may have thought, afterwards at least, that the Saviour's hunger represented his ardent desire of saving the nation, so unfaithful to his call, who were about to bring down the curse of God upon their own heads. Several of the Fathers consider the episode as showing that Christ judged it timely to remind the Twelve that he was going to his death freely, since he had in his hands the power to crush his enemies. A fig tree was sacrificed for that object-lesson. Is it not somewhat ridiculous to pity the tree, as some critics mawkishly do?

Faith and prayer

22-26. The two topics are connected by the virtue of faith. He who has faith enough, will have his

faith in God. ²³ Amen I say to you, that whosoever would say to this mountain, "Be thou removed and be cast into the sea," and would not doubt in his heart, but believe that what he saith is to come to pass, it shall be done for him. ²⁴ Wherefore I say to you, all things whatsoever you ask for in prayer, believe that ye have received them, and they shall come unto you. ²⁵ And when you stand to pray, forgive if you have aught against any man, that your Father who is in heaven may also forgive you your transgressions.'

²⁷ And they came again to Jerusalem. And as he

request granted if he says to 'this' mountain (the Mount of Olives or any other mountain), 'Be thou lifted up and cast into the sea' (the Dead Sea or any other). This faith is not ordinary faith, but the conviction that here and now God will grant the miracle; a faith which demands a special supernatural grace, and such grace will be granted only when the miracle will be useful to the kingdom of God. Christ did not intend to make his disciples mountain-carriers. Moreover, this trusting faith must be the mainspring of our prayer, if we wish to have our request granted. After touching on the subject of prayer, Mark adds the Saviour's admonition that we must forgive others before asking God's forgiveness for ourselves. This disposition is also expressed in the Lord's prayer (Matt. 6: 14; Luke 11: 4). Mark records only a few fragments of Christ's teaching on prayer, which is so fully developed in Luke.

Question of the Sanhedrists about Christ's mission

27-33. After the expulsion of the sellers from the Temple, the three classes which made up the Sanhedrin

was walking in the temple, the chief priests and the scribes and the ancients came to him, ²⁸ and they said to him: 'By what authority dost thou these things? Or who gave thee this authority that thou shouldst do these things?' ²⁹ But Jesus said to them: 'I will ask you one question: answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. ³⁰ The baptism of John—was it of heaven or of men? Answer me.' ³¹ And they reasoned among themselves, saying: 'If we say, "Of heaven," he will say, "Why then did ye not believe him?" But are we to say, "Of men"?' ³² they feared the people, for all held that

must have become aroused. Even if the lay aristocracy had no part in the plot, they were easily persuaded to interrogate the agitator. Not from them had Christ received authority to perform such a high-handed deed. Had he taken orders elsewhere or, if he had acted of his own accord, whence did he acquire such boldness? Jesus does not refuse to answer; he even puts his questioners on the track, by speaking of John. For if, as they ought, they confess the Baptist's divine mission, why should they oppose his? If the question embarrasses them, that is because they do not care to answer according to their conscience. As shrewd debaters, they try to foresee the rejoinder before they give out their reply. Mark's phrase pictures the hesitation in their minds. Their opposition to the Baptist had displeased the multitudes. But, since his death, they had probably enshrined his memory. Yet they judge it far better not to raise such a delicate problem again. To acknowledge John's divine mission was to condemn their own past attitude. Then why should they be more strict against Jesus?

John had been truly a prophet. ³³ And answering Jesus, they said, 'We know not.' And Jesus saith to them, 'Neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things.'

CHAPTER XII

¹ And he began to speak to them in parables: 'A man planted a vineyard, and he fenced it round and dug a wine-vat and built a tower; and he let it to husbandmen and went abroad.

² 'And in due time he sent to the husbandmen a servant to receive from the husbandmen of the fruits of the vineyard. ³ And having laid hands on him,

Still less could they deny that John was a prophet and a martyr. Christ might have said: It is strange that you know not. But he merely ignored an authority that was so elusive.

Allegory of the wicked husbandmen

12: 1-15. The Messiah had resolved to warn the Jews of the consequences of the crime which they were about to commit and which was to cause an outpouring of the divine wrath. So long the object of divine favours and so often ungrateful, Israel was to be rejected. In order to be more easily understood, the Saviour bade them hear a parable, very akin to an allegory, so clearly did it designate the relations of the chosen people with God. Isaiah (5: 2) had compared Israel to a vine bringing forth wild grapes. In the Gospel, the husbandmen are the nation's chiefs, who want to appropriate the fruit of the vine. The lord of

they beat him, and sent him away empty. ⁴ And again he sent unto them another servant ; and him they wounded in the head and shamefully ill-treated. ⁵ And he sent another ; and him they killed, and many besides, beating some and slaying others. ⁶ One he yet had, a beloved son ; him he sent to them last, saying, " They will reverence my son." ⁷ But those husbandmen said to one another, " This is the heir ; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours." ⁸ And laying hold of him, they killed him, and cast the corpse

the vineyard is God ; his servants are the prophets and other men who have spoken in his name. Mark describes the sending of three servants one after another ; they were insulted and beaten, each time with increasing cruelty, the last one even being put to death ; then many others were wounded or killed. The order of events in Mark's account is less artistic than that of Matthew or Luke. Last of all comes the beloved and only son, who clearly is Jesus himself, the Son of God. This last messenger the husbandmen put to death and cast the corpse out of the vineyard, whereas, according to Matthew and Luke, the son is taken out of the vineyard to be slain, as it happened to Jesus, outside the walls of Jerusalem. Hardly could the husbandmen hope, after their crime, that they would be allowed to enjoy the spoils in peace, whilst the Sanhedrists cherished the hope that in putting Jesus to death they would remain the masters in Israel. The allegory is transparent. But once those wicked husbandmen are rejected, the rest of the people are no longer the people of God. If the vineyard is transferred to others, the reason is that the ancient order is abolished. It can be conjectured that these others will be

out of the vineyard. ⁹ What will the lord of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the husbandmen, and give the vineyard to others. ¹⁰ And have you not read this Scripture:

“The stone which the builders rejected,
The same is become the corner-stone;

¹¹ This is the Lord's doing,
And it is wonderful in our eyes”?

¹² And they sought to seize him, but they feared the people; for they knew that he had spoken the parable of them. And leaving him, they went their way.

¹³ And they sent unto him some of the Pharisees and Herodians to ensnare him by a question. ¹⁴ And they came and say to him: ‘Master, we know that thou art truthful, and carest not for any man, for thou regardest not the conventionalities of men, but teachest the way of God according to truth: is it lawful to

a new people, entrusted with the mission of doing God's work and bringing to him the fruits which he expects.

The glorious destiny of the Son put to death was also to be outlined. A parable is not enough for that. Christ refers the doctors to the inspired word of God. There (Ps. 117: 22-23) they can read about a stone which the masons or architects at first rejected, but which became either the foundation-stone, or—since the rejected stone can be used only after the foundation is built—the corner-stone which crowns the edifice and unites two of the walls. It was indeed the Messiah's rôle to be the corner-stone, chosen and precious (Is. 28: 16). The nation's chiefs in their blindness would stumble against God's design, hidden at first, but later on admirable in the eyes of all.

give tribute to Cæsar or not? Should we give it or should we not give it?' ¹⁵ But he, piercing through their snare, said to them: 'Why do ye tempt me? Bring me a denarius and let me see it.' ¹⁶ And they

Cæsar's right to tribute

16-17. The Sanhedrists realized that their wicked intention was discovered but they did not give it up. Again they tried to ensnare Christ. It was not easy to catch him in controversy; but they might try to compromise him in the eyes of the Romans, who were stolidly indifferent to Jewish religious questions, but were little inclined to tolerate attempts or even doctrines that might endanger their authority.

The Herodians, desirous both of pleasing the Pharisees and of not displeasing the procurator, were the logical intermediaries and informers. The question was really a snare in which more than one simple soul was caught. Judas the Galilean had rejected the foreign yoke in order to obey God alone. And he had been treated by the Romans as a revolutionist. At least his attitude had been frank and honest. But to accept the yoke of Cæsar and at the same time claim to be the Messiah—was not that a mockery? The Pharisees flatter him. The Master is so sincere, so incapable of betraying a truth, even though it may have painful consequences; but he will in any event teach the way of God. Then follows the interrogation. It is very pressing; they must have a yes or no. To pay the tribute is to confess that the people of God are subject to a heathen power. Was not the rôle of the Judges and of other messengers of God always to reject

brought [it] ; and he saith to them, ' Whose is this image and inscription ? ' They said to him, ' Cæsar's.'¹⁷ And Jesus said, ' Render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and to God the things that are God's.' And they marvelled at him.

this yoke ? Jesus speaks as if he had never seen a denarius ; at all events he had none with him. The denarius was a silver coin, smaller than a quarter ; the Herodian princes never had the right to coin anything but copper. The Hasmonæans had coined silver shekels, without any image on them. Jesus purposely asks for a denarius. His decision is very clear, but deep. Not that the duties to Cæsar are on the same footing as the duties to God ; but a regularly established power has a right to obedience, since its duty is to see that justice is rendered and peace maintained. The tribute, proof and symbol of subjection, is due to it as long as it demands nothing contrary to the law of God. Such is the doctrine developed by S. Paul (Rom. 13 : 1 ff.). This is not to refuse nations the right to dispose of themselves. In fact, the Jews, very much divided, had escaped tyranny or anarchy only through the Roman domination. The Pharisees themselves had desired and accepted it. They expected something better from the future, a Messianic restoration ; but at the time, the Zealots alone believed in salvation through armed force and, when their hour came, they plunged the nation into the abyss. Why, in those anxious days, not render to Cæsar his coin, which was a token of the public order for which he was responsible ? The answer was so wise and spiritual that, this time at least, his enemies were compelled to pay him a tribute of admiration.

¹⁸ And there came unto him Sadducees, men who say that there is no resurrection; and they asked him: ¹⁹ 'Master, Moses prescribed for us that "if a man's brother die and leave a widow but no child, his brother should marry the widow and should raise up issue to his brother." ²⁰ There were seven brothers. And the first took a wife, and died leaving no issue; ²¹ and the second took her and died, and neither did

The resurrection of the dead

18-27. The difficulty proposed by the Sadducees was not exposed to such an apparently fatal issue. It was one of those objections which they were wont to propound to their ordinary opponents, the Pharisees. The Sadducees were 'the sons of Sadoq,' that is, the representatives of the high priesthood. In their relations with the Græco-Egyptian and the Græco-Syrian governments, they had lost something of their Jewish faith; and, on the other hand, their conservative spirit prevented them from following the progress of revelation. They acknowledged as inspired only the Pentateuch which, especially as a collection of laws, was concerned exclusively with the temporal destinies of Israel. Under the influence of this twofold current of ideas, they refused to believe in the resurrection of the dead, and even in the existence of angels and spirits (Acts 23 : 8). The resurrection of the dead was, on the contrary, a fundamental dogma of orthodox Judaism, represented by the Pharisees. Interpreted with a certain gross realism, it was hard to defend. For instance, if a woman had been married twice, of which husband would she be the wife after the resurrection? It must be remarked that Christ, by forbidding

he leave any issue. And the third. In like manner ²² the seven left no issue. Last of all the woman also dies. ²³ In the resurrection, when they shall rise again, of which of them shall she be wife ? ' ²⁴ Jesus saith to them : ' Do you not therefore, because you err, know not the Scriptures, nor the power of God ? ²⁵ For when they shall rise from the dead, they shall neither marry nor be given in marriage, but they shall

marriage after divorce, had very materially reduced the difficulty. To give emphasis to their objection, the Sadducees suppose a rather complicated imaginary situation. The case proposed is that of a woman who had been the legitimate wife of several men, a case of the levirate marriage, regulated by Moses. The ancients attached an extreme importance to the perpetuity of families. If a man died without male offspring, his brother was designated to give him heirs and perpetuate his name by marrying the widow. Now pushing this case to the absurd, the Sadducees suppose that this widow has been espoused in succession by the six younger brothers, all of whom had died one after another, leaving the widow still surviving. On account of the absence of issue, none of those brothers has more right than the others to call that widow his wife.

Our Lord makes a deep reply altogether different from subtle casuistry. In the world of the resurrection, there will be neither husbands nor wives. Of course, if he had meant that men will be pure spirits, like angels, he would have denied the resurrection. The comparison is not so much about the nature of angels as about our participation in the divine life which is to be our lot, as it is theirs. By denying the resurrection, the Sadducees showed that they were

be as the angels in heaven. ²⁶ And concerning the dead that they rise again, have you not read in the Book of Moses, at the Bush, how God spoke to him, saying, " I am the God of Abraham and the God of Jacob " ? ²⁷ He is not a God of dead men but of living. Greatly do you err.'

²⁸ And there came one of the scribes, who had heard

unable to understand the power of God and even that Pentateuch whose authority they respected. For it is in a section of Exodus, treating of the burning bush in the desert of Sinai, that God revealed himself to Moses as the God of the patriarchs. The primary meaning of this text is that he had been honoured by the fathers during their life ; but it has another meaning. If God cares for the descendants of Abraham, it is because Abraham is still his friend. He would not say that he is his God, if Abraham was no more than a mere remembrance in some small corner of the earth. On the other hand, the patriarchs were not mere spirits, but men. They went to the Sheol after their death, but that precarious existence was not the life which God intends for those whom he loves and which he will give them through the resurrection. This argumentation, so subtle in appearance, contains the strongest reason to hope for the blessed immortality befitting our nature. If he who loves God cannot conceive or admit eternal separation from him, will not God who is infinitely powerful and loving perform the miracle necessary to fulfil the aspirations of his own ?

The great commandment

28-34. The Pharisees must have been pleased by the refutation of the Sadducees. But the victorious

their discussion, and seeing that he had answered them well, asked him, 'What is the first commandment of all?' ²⁹ Jesus answered: 'The first is: "Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord. ³⁰ And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul and with thy whole mind and with thy whole strength." ³¹ The second is this: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." There is no other commandment greater than these.' ³² And

stand of Christ in favour of the Law was not sufficient indeed to calm their resentment; still we may easily conceive that one of them might have asked of him an honest question in order to get more information. At least Mark presents the fact under that aspect. There was scarcely any possible doubt about the commandment which was the greatest of all. It was the summary of the Decalogue (Deut. 6: 4). The Jews were conscious of it; for they used to recite even in those days the prayer which they have to recite twice a day, the *Shema* ('Listen!'), so called from its first word. To this supreme commandment Jesus, without having been asked, adds another, because he considered it as flowing from the first. Still it was separated from it in the Pentateuch by a rather long interval (Lev. 19: 18).

The neighbour in Leviticus was an Israelite, whilst Jesus meant it of all men, as is clear in Luke (10: 25 ff.) from the parable of the Good Samaritan. Philo of Alexandria realized that those were two chapter headings in the list of duties; but instead of love of God he speaks of 'piety and holiness' (*De Septenaris*). The solution given by Christ has from the first become so completely the rule of Christians that Paul quotes only the second commandment as containing the whole

the scribe said to him: 'Master! Thou hast perfectly well said that "He is one and that there is no other but he," ³³ and that to "love him with the whole heart and with the whole understanding and with one's whole strength," and to "love one's neighbour as oneself," is far more than all "the holocausts and sacrifices." ' ³⁴ And Jesus, seeing that he had answered wisely, said to him, 'Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.' And no man, after that, dared ask him any question.

³⁵ And Jesus answering, said, teaching in the

Law (Rom. 13: 8 f.; Gal. 5: 14). The scribe, delighted, re-echoes the teaching of the Master, in emphasizing, as Isaiah had done, the superiority of the religious moral law over practices of worship. In turn, Jesus approves him; but it is not known whether the man answered that discreet call. No other attempt was made to catch Jesus by questions; his enemies know to what they must have recourse in order to silence him.

The origin of the Messiah

35-37. The Messiah now asks them a simple question about the Messiah. The main reason for the blindness of the doctors regarding his person was the wrong idea they had of the Messiah, the Son of David, and consequently the restorer of the Kingdom according to the same methods of wars and victories as of old. And they were about to condemn Jesus, because he was going to proclaim himself Son of God. Should they not rather make a closer scrutiny of the sacred texts?

The Davidic descent was clearly stated in Holy Scripture; Jesus does not deny it. But there was

temple : ' How do the scribes say that the Christ is son of David ? ³⁶ David himself said, in the Holy Spirit :

" The Lord said to my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand,
Until I put thine enemies beneath thy feet."

³⁷ David himself calleth him " Lord " ; whence is he his son ? ' And the mass of the people listened to him gladly.

³⁸ And in the course of his teaching, he said :

something more. In a psalm ascribed to David, the psalmist calls him his Lord. How could he be only his son ? Even if the Messiah should be a greater king than David, the latter would not call him his Lord, and what is still more extraordinary, a lord sitting at the right hand of the Lord. The inference has a positive side by which it appeals to all, the psalm having been written by David. Still, we must not forget that Jesus spoke to the crowd to show them how Pharisees are unsafe guides, especially on the question of the Messiah, which they pretend to judge. They certainly admit that David spoke under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and that he spoke of the Messiah.

Therefore the argument *ad hominem* strikes them with full force. And how different their ideal is from that of the psalmist ! According to Mark (and Luke) Jesus did not care to start a direct controversy with them. He was satisfied to warn the crowd ; but since they had spies everywhere, they were thus invited to deeper reflection ; this is equivalent indeed to the direct provocation as narrated by Matthew.

The scribes are rebuked

38-40. Poor judges of prophecies, the doctors of the Pharisaic party gave mostly dangerous examples

'Beware of the scribes, who love to walk about in long robes, and to be saluted in the market-places, ³⁹ and to have the first seats in the synagogues and the first couches at dinners, ⁴⁰ men who devour the houses of widows and make pretence of long prayers. These shall receive a more severe judgement.'

⁴¹ And sitting over against the Treasury, he watched the multitude casting money into the Treasury. And many rich were casting in large sums. ⁴² And there

against which people must be warned. Their most striking defect, as well acknowledged by the Talmud, was affectation in piety. They believed they had a right to special honours as exemplars of legal perfection. They received such honours upon this pretext ; but they took pleasure in them. (It was really a curious sight just a few years ago—for now they are replaced by modernizing Jews—to see the notables of Israel walking slowly on Saturdays with their very long coats of yellow or violet corduroy. The people in the bazaars bowed very low to them, the right hand making a still lower curve.) They always had seats of honour in the synagogue and reserved seats at meals. To the reproach of vanity Jesus adds a more serious accusation. The Pharisees, according to Josephus, had great credit with women, on account of their repute for piety. It was especially easy to succeed with widows ; and they knew how to take advantage of that situation.

The widow's mite

41-44. The treasury of the Temple contained a considerable amount of wealth both in precious things and in gold and silver. The Mishna speaks of chests into which money was cast from the outside. The

came one poor widow, who cast in two mites, which make about half a cent. ⁴³ And he called unto him his disciples, and said to them : ' Amen I say to you, this poor widow hath cast in more than all who have cast into the treasury ; ⁴⁴ for all they did cast in of their abundance, but she of her want cast in all she had, her whole living.'

CHAPTER XIII

¹ And as he was going out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, ' Master, look what stones, and what buildings !' ² And Jesus said to him : ' Seest thou these great buildings ? There shall not be left here a stone upon a stone, that shall not be thrown down.'

widow's mite was the smallest possible contribution, not quite half of a cent. She gave more than the rich, because merit is measured by the intention, and the intensity of her charity was predominant ; she gave all that she had. The rich gave ostentatiously gold and silver, but it was, after all, very small change.

Prediction of the destruction of the Temple

13 : 1-2. The Temple at Jerusalem was then resplendent in the glorious beauty of its massive white blocks. Some rows of them are still an object of admiration in the wall of Haran, which surrounds the so-called Mosque of Omar, situated on the spot where stood the altar of holocausts. The Temple properly so called, or sanctuary, has completely disappeared. After the siege of Jerusalem, Titus caused it to be entirely destroyed. Jesus' prophecy was fulfilled to

³ And when he was seated upon the Mount of Olives, over against the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, ⁴ 'Tell us when shall these things be, and what shall be the sign when all these things shall be about to be accomplished?'

⁵ And Jesus began to say to them: 'Look to it that no man lead you astray. ⁶ Many shall come in my name, saying, "I am he," and they shall lead

the letter. The religious centre of Judaism has disappeared for ever.

Question as to the end

3-4. Struck by these words, Peter waits before asking a question until the little company were seated on the Mount of Olives, over against this superb building; his brother Andrew was this time with the two sons of Zebedee. He expects a catastrophe in the near future. His question is twofold; but perhaps the second part is only an alternative. If the date were well known, a sign would not be necessary. But it may be that the date will be indicated only in a vague manner, through signs. The two questions thus co-ordinated are relative to the ruin of the Temple; but it could be apprehended only as a consequence of the ruin of Jerusalem according to all the laws of history.

Discourses on the ruin of the Temple and the coming of the Son of Man

5-8. Peter had asked only one question. Jesus speaks at the same time of another event of which the first is in a way the previous condition and almost the symbol. The elements of the two predictions are

many astray. ⁷ And when you shall hear of wars and rumours of wars, be not alarmed ; these things " must befall," but the end is not yet. ⁸ For " nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom " ; there shall be earthquakes in places, there shall be famines. These things are but the beginning of sorrows.

⁹ ' Look to yourselves. For they shall deliver you up to sanhedrins and you shall be beaten in synagogues, and you shall stand before governors and

distinct enough for us to recognize two facts ; but they are so near each other in the context that the second might be taken as an immediate sequel of the first. This perspective, obscure for the Apostles, was made clearer by time. Besides, when Jesus gives a clear answer to the question concerning the sign, he plainly distinguishes the two facts, one of which is near, whilst the date of the second is known only by the Father.

The ruin of the Temple and of Jerusalem

9-18. Jesus begins by sketching the times which are coming. They will be so troubled that men will be in danger of being deceived by prognostics. There will be pseudo-Messiahs, there will be wars and earthquakes and famines. The first feature is special to Jewish history ; it was realized literally (*Le Messianisme* . . . , pp. 20 ff.). The others belong to all calamitous epochs, and were not wanting before the ruin of Jerusalem, *v.g.*, the atrocious civil wars which followed Nero's death, the famine under Claudius, earthquakes in Asia Minor.

But thenceforth there will be something new in the world and the Apostles will be its heroes, namely, the

kings for my sake, for a testimony unto them. ¹⁰ And unto all the nations the gospel must first be preached.

¹¹ And when they shall lead you away to deliver you up, have no care beforehand as to what you shall say, but whatsoever is given you in that hour, that speak ye ; for it is not you that speak, but the Holy Spirit.

¹² And the brother shall deliver up his brother to death, and the father his child ; and “ children shall rise up against their parents ” and shall work their death.

¹³ And you shall be hated of all for my name’s sake. But he that shall persevere to the end, he shall be saved.

¹⁴ ‘ Now when you see the abomination of desolation

preaching of the gospel, to which persecution will be the answer both from the Jews in their synagogues, and from the Gentiles. The Master wished to warn his disciples in advance ; to these threats of hostile powers, he opposes the help of the Holy Ghost. The most difficult thing for good people of moderate culture is not to die with simplicity, but to answer appropriately before the tribunals so as not to compromise a sacred cause. Jesus’ promise could not be more opportune. And in that world where bonds of kinship were so sacred, what anguish for anyone to be delivered up and hated by his own ! But it will be for the name of Jesus, and salvation will be the reward. The gospel will be the preaching of the religion of Jesus, and for his sake they will have to face death.

Now (verse 14) events are precipitated ; the sign is indicated, ‘ the abomination of desolation.’ These mysterious words are taken from Daniel (9 : 27), where they probably apply to the statue of the Semitic Baal which Antiochus Epiphanes erected in the Temple under the Greek name of Zeus Olympius in 168 B.C.

standing where it ought not—let him that readeth understand!—then let them that are in Judea flee to the mountains; ¹⁵ let not him that is upon the house-top come down and enter to take anything from his house, ¹⁶ and let him that shall be in the field not turn back to fetch his cloak.

¹⁷ 'Woe to them that are with child and to them that give suck in those days! ¹⁸ Pray that it befall not in the winter; ¹⁹ for those shall be such tribulations as were not "from the beginning of the creation" which God created "until now," and never shall be.

In Mark's text the words mean, not the repetition of the same act, but some analogous profanation: the presence of the armies of the enemy in the Holy Land, and still more the driving away of worshippers from the Temple courts.

The parenthetic 'Let him that readeth understand,' if it is our Lord's own, is an allusion to the words of Daniel whose prophecy shall be accomplished again in a mysterious sense; but it is more probably Mark's. Then those who are in Judea should flee. According to Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.*, III, v, 3), the Christians of Jerusalem had fled to the little town of Pella, east of the Jordan (now Tabakat Fahil, opposite Beisan). In a country with few roads, where swollen torrents make the roads impassable, it was very opportune not to take flight during the winter.

The advent of the Son of Man

19-27. The beginning of this section stands in regard to the preceding one in the same relation as Daniel 12: 1 to 11: 45. In Daniel the destruction of the enemy is announced; then, without any other

²⁰ And unless the Lord had shortened the days, no flesh would be saved. But for the sake of the elect whom he hath chosen, he hath shortened the days.

²¹ ' And then if any man shall say to you, "lo, here is the Christ," "lo, there," believe it not. ²² For there shall arise false christs and false prophets, and they shall work signs and wonders so as to mislead, if possible, the elect. ²³ But take you heed therefore ; I have foretold you all.

²⁴ ' But in those days, after that distress, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light. ²⁵ And stars shall be falling from heaven, and the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken. ²⁶ And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. ²⁷ And then shall he send the angels and gather together his elect

indication, both the rhythm and the scene change. So Mark passes from a restricted stage and a scene which has its special historical aspect, though veiled with mystery, to an immense distress that threatens all mankind. That we have here a new section results clearly from the fact that Jesus speaks again of false Christs. Twice (20, 22) the elect are mentioned. Their salvation is the important question, the supreme judgment is at hand. The world is about to end ; the great mechanism gets out of gear. Then comes the Son of Man to gather his elect. So, the former event took place in Judea, it was the destruction of the Temple ; one may take to flight and go live elsewhere. The latter is not situated anywhere, its aim is the discerning of the elect whom the Son of Man is seeking. The only feature of real resemblance is that of false Messiahs or false Christs which seems to make of the first the figure

from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth unto the uttermost part of the heavens.

²⁸ ' Now of the fig-tree learn a parable. When the branch thereof is now tender and leaves are come forth, you know that summer is nigh. ²⁹ So in like manner ye, when ye behold these things coming to pass, know that it is nigh, at the door. ³⁰ Amen I say to you, this generation shall not pass away until all these things be done. ³¹ Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.

of the second. It might be objected that Christ does not assign any interval of time between the two. He tells us why : the date of the latter must remain hidden.

The parable of the fig tree

28-31. In Jerusalem, after a rather sharp winter, summer breaks forth as early as March ; the budding leaves of the fig tree herald its presence infallibly. So, Christ explains, when you behold these things coming to pass, those that have the character of signs—wars, famines, and especially the abomination of desolation in the Holy Land—then you shall know that it is nigh, at the door. The other features, such as the fall of the stars and the darkening of the sun, are not so much signs as the final upheaval. Abstracting from the latter, we ask : Which is then the event that will be at the door ? The first one, to which the question of Peter and of his companions had reference. That one is near, and it will take place within the lifetime of Christ's hearers. Jesus affirms it strongly ; and history has proved the truth of his affirmation. He was speaking about the year 33, and Jerusalem was taken and destroyed in 70. When he adds : My words

³² ' But of that day or hour no man knoweth, not even the angels in heaven nor yet the Son, but only

will not pass away, this second affirmation reaches beyond the horizon of the first. It is the teaching of Christ, the doctrine of the gospel, which is assured to last longer than the world. Truth is eternal.

The time of the advent of the Son of Man must not be known

32. Two explanations have been advanced. According to some non-Catholic critics, the preceding prediction (28-31) refers to the advent of the Son of Man. We restrict it to the ruin of the Jewish nation. What seems to us a decisive argument is that Jesus passes now to the second advent: 'about that day or that hour,' namely, the solemn day, the day *par excellence*, that of God's last judgement. Unless this interpretation is accepted, one must explain with those critics how Jesus consented to reveal how the end of the world was near but without determining precisely the day and the hour when it would take place. This calendar date would be a secret reserved to his Father. A childish explanation, exploded by the demonstrative *that* day and not *the* day. In the Greek text, this pronoun applies also to the hour: 'that day or that hour' meaning 'that solemn moment.' Nothing is more frequent in the prophets, even from Amos, than the threatening announcement of the day of judgement. In the gospel perspective, it is the last day (2 Thess. 1: 10; 2 Tim. 1: 12, 18; 4: 8).

The difficulty contained in verse 32 is well known. Is the Son—related to the Father, in the sphere of his Godhead, above the angels—really ignorant of the day

the Father. ³³ Take heed, watch ; for ye know not when the time is. ³⁴ It is as if a man who going into a far country left his house and gave authority to his servants, to each one his work, and had commanded the porter to keep watch. ³⁵ Watch ye, therefore, for you know not when the master of the house cometh,

of the judgement over which he will preside ? To restrict this ignorance to his human nature would hardly be a solution ; for the name Son, contrasted with the Father, designates the Person of Jesus, a divine one, and not merely his human nature. Besides, as said before, authorized theology attributes to Jesus, as man, the beatific vision. Therefore the only explanation possible is this : the Son, sent by the Father and a confidant of his secrets, is not commissioned to reveal this one. This solution would seem too subtle, indeed, if the persons concerned were human persons. But, it must not be forgotten that, at this period especially, the name Father designates God as inaccessible and hidden (John 1 : 18). He communicates himself to man through his Son. What the Son must not communicate, as being a secret, is proper to the Father.

Watchfulness

33-37. This is a special conclusion relative to the coming of the Son of Man ; we must watch. To impress upon his hearers this lesson of watchfulness, Jesus tells them a parable like that of the fig tree, but of an anti-thetic parallelism. The fig tree represented a sign ; be therefore attentive to the signs of the times so as to interpret them properly. As to the great event, we know nothing and can foresee nothing. There is but one conclusion : we must watch as servants whose

whether at eventide or at midnight or at cock-crow or in the morning, ³⁶ lest coming on a sudden he find you sleeping. ³⁷ And what I say to you, I say to all, Watch.'

master will return suddenly, perhaps early, perhaps late. In Mark's context, the parable is connected with the advent of the Son of Man coming to judge. But may not everyone say that death is the moment when the Son of Man will come to ask for an account of our stewardship? This is truly the meaning of a similar parable of Luke (12 : 36 ff.), and it is also what is suggested by the last word. Jesus expressly notes that it is meant for 'all,' which designates not only the disciples then living, but, since the coming of the Master may be tardy, all those who, in the future, may be found in the same situation. The individual character of the warning is then very pronounced even in Mark's context.

Besides, in explaining so difficult a chapter we must take account of the aspect which the discourses of Jesus must have assumed from the fact that several were grouped into one. Whilst inspiration excludes positively any deformation of his teaching, it is not incompatible with different groupings of events which would give them appreciably different shades of meaning ; the same, obviously, may be said of the discourses. Now from Matthew and Luke it is clear—though we cannot dwell on it here—that this twofold theme of which Mark treats but once, has been treated by our Lord several times. Catholic exegetes would deny all their own principles, should they refuse to make a diligent study of the modalities of interpretation which result from this fact.

CHAPTER XIV

¹ Now the Passover and the feast of the unleavened bread was after two days. And the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might seize him by guile and put him to death. ² For they said, 'Not during the festival, lest there be a tumult among the people.'

³ And when he was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, and had sat at table, there came a woman with an alabaster jar of ointment—pure

The plot and its date

14: 1-2. The Passover and the feast of the 'unleavened bread,' the Azymes, designate the same feast, according to the custom of that time. With the Jews, days began and ended with sunset. When the 15th Nisan began—we call it the evening of the 14th—the paschal lamb was eaten. The following day—the 15th, as we would say—the feast of the unleavened bread began. But, since unleavened bread alone was allowed at the paschal meal, it could be said therefore that the feast of the unleavened bread began also that night of the 14th. 'Two days before,' if the paschal lamb was to be eaten on Friday night—we shall return to this point—means Wednesday. In fact the primitive Church used to fast on Wednesday in remembrance of Judas' betrayal. It was the beginning of the Passion. The enemies of Jesus are decided not to wait until the end of the feast, which would be the signal for the return to Galilee; and they fear an uproar during the feast. They cannot afford, then, to lose any time.

nard of great value ; and she broke the alabaster jar and poured it over his head. ⁴ And some were exchanging expressions of indignation among themselves : ' Wherefore hath this waste of the ointment been made ? ' ⁵ This ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor.' And they murmured against her. ⁶ But Jesus said : ' Let her alone ; why do you trouble her ? '

The anointing at Bethany

3-9. By relating here the anointing at Bethany, Mark seems to assign its date as Wednesday evening. But John says expressly that it occurred six days before the Passover (John 12 : 1), namely, the preceding Saturday, and this very precise date must be adhered to. Mark did not wish to interrupt his account of the journey from Jericho to Jerusalem. He assigns the anointing, prelude to the Passion, to the day when the latter was about to begin. If it occurred between the plot of the priests and the betrayal by Judas, this is probably due to the fact that the indignation caused in the traitor by this lavishness did away with his last scruples. Mark, though not mentioning his name, implies the narrative of John (12 : 4-5). Nor is the woman's name given. John again supplies the name, Mary, sister of Martha and Lazarus. Simon, probably cured of his leprosy at that time, was their friend and considered it an honour to receive Jesus. Nard was an aromatic plant from India, used to perfume oil. It was contained in an elegant alabaster jar, which the woman broke—an exquisite feature of prodigality, special to Mark's narrative. Why should she have broken the alabaster, if she did not have a presentiment that this

She hath wrought a good work upon me. ⁷ For the poor you have with you always, and whenever you will you can do good to them ; but me you have not always. ⁸ What she could, she hath done ; she hath anointed my body beforehand for burial. ⁹ Amen I say to you, wheresoever the gospel is preached throughout the world, that also which she hath done shall be told for a memorial of her.'

ointment would be the last poured over the head of Jesus? . . . Thus the words 'she has anointed my body beforehand for burial' have their full bearing. An anointing inspired merely by courtesy would not have deserved such glorious praise. That woman had then penetrated the mystery of the Passion, to which the disciples were still impervious. Hence their indignation. Three hundred denarii represented the wages of three hundred days (Matt. 20 : 2). Jesus did not say : There will be always poor people, as if it were a divine decree which men would oppose when they try to attenuate the difference of social conditions, but simply as a matter of fact, you will have always the poor with you. The woman could not prevent the death of her Master ; but, whether or not she had a foreboding that the anointing following Christ's death would be incomplete, she rendered to his sacred body the homage which the Israelites paid to the dead. The prediction is fully realized whenever, reading or preaching the Passion, we come to this page of the Gospel. The one here praised is Mary, sister of Martha, of an emphatically distinct individuality, since she is not to be identified either with Mary of Magdala, or with the woman who was a sinner (Luke 7 : 36, 50).

¹⁰ And Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went off unto the chief priests to betray him to them. ¹¹ And hearing it, they were glad, and promised to give him money. And he sought how he might conveniently betray him.

¹² And on the first day of the unleavened bread, when they sacrificed the pasch, his disciples said to him, 'Where wilt thou that we go and prepare

The betrayal by Judas

10-11. What a contrast ! But what a deep connection ! Judas, the treasurer of the little group (John 12 : 6), more indignant than the rest over the wasteful anointing, more accessible to the attractiveness of money, goes to the priests, doubtless because he suspected their design. To 'deliver' is to lead gently an unsuspecting friend to the place where the police are waiting to apprehend him, without it being possible for him to defend himself or to be defended. And this is exactly what was most agreeable to Jesus' enemies : they hated him more, since they give money ; but the soul of the other was more abject, since he takes it.

Preparations for the Last Supper

12-16. The first day of the unleavened bread is here again, in the style of Mark, synonymous with the day of the Passover. Roughly speaking, it was the 15th Nisan, but begun by the Jews on the evening of the 14th. Mark then designates here the morning of the 14th Nisan at the latest. But his text could be translated : 'the day before the immolation,' and then this could be the 13th Nisan. If we give to John's testimony the credit that it deserves, the official eating of the

for thee to eat the pasch ? ' ¹³ And he sendeth two of his disciples and saith to them : ' Go ye into the city, and there shall meet you a man carrying a pitcher of water ; follow him, ¹⁴ and wheresoever he shall go in, say to the master of the house : " The Master saith, ' Where is my guest-chamber, wherein I may eat the pasch with my disciples ? ' " ¹⁵ And he will show you a large upper room, with carpets and cushions, and ready ; and there prepare ye for us.'

¹⁶ And the disciples went forth and came into the

lamb took place only on the evening of Christ's death. But since, on the other hand, the Last Supper as narrated by the Synoptics was first the paschal meal, we must suppose that Jesus anticipated by one day the celebration of this rite. According as we interpret Mark in the sense of 13th or 14th Nisan, his text will or will not have suggested this anticipation.

The preparations were not made necessarily on the last day ; but they required one day at least, granting that the lamb had already been selected, etc. The Galileans depended on their friends in Jerusalem for that remote preparation. Indeed the Saviour made arrangements in advance about it, knowing that he could rely on friends. But to show his disciples his foreknowledge of the minutest details and try their docility, he sends them, as it were blindly, towards the goal well known to him. The upper room destined for the paschal meal was a large room on the floor above the rooms which were used for the usual household purposes ; it served the purpose of a reception hall or dining room. Rugs and pillows were used instead of chairs. Each one could thus more easily reach towards the common dish.

city, and found as he had told them. And they prepared the pasch. ¹⁷ And when evening was come, he cometh with the twelve. ¹⁸ And whilst they were at table and eating, Jesus said, 'Amen I say to you, one of you that eateth with me will betray me.' ¹⁹ They began to be sorrowful and to say to him, one by one, 'Is it I?' ²⁰ He said to them: 'One of the twelve, who dippeth with me into the dish. ²¹ For the Son of man goeth as it is written of him; but woe to that man through whom the Son of man is betrayed! It were good for that man if he had not been born.'

The betrayal announced

17-21. The meal takes place at night, as required by the Law on the feast of the Passover. According to the primitive rite, those partaking of the meal were to do so standing; but the custom had prevailed of taking it reclining on couches, like free men and persons of distinction. According to Luke, the announcement of the betrayal follows the institution of the Eucharist. In Mark it precedes it, as a warning given to the traitor, with a view to taking him away. If Mark's order is the historical one, it is doubtful whether Judas received the body and blood of Christ. Since the traitor did not take any account of gentle dealings, he may perhaps yield to threats. However, Jesus, who is to die so as to fulfil the Scriptures, does not wish publicly to expose him. Whilst he was answering the anxious questions of the Twelve, perhaps Judas then dipped his hand into the common dish; but they might have supposed that Christ's words applied not to any single one but to the Twelve in general.

²² And whilst they were eating he took bread, and after having pronounced a blessing he broke it and gave to them, and said, 'Take ye, this is my body.' ²³ And he took a cup and, giving thanks, gave to them, and all drank thereof. ²⁴ And he said to them : 'This is my blood, of the covenant, which is being

Institution of the Holy Eucharist

22-25. Whilst they were eating, that is, whilst they were still at table, the paschal meal being over (1 Cor. 11 : 23). What follows looks more like the two multiplications of the loaves than like any of the rites of the paschal meal. The wording is as clear as it is extraordinary. In the Greek, the pronoun 'this' is the subject, that is, the bread which Christ held in his hands, and the verb affirms the identity of this subject with the predicate, 'My body.' In the Aramaic language the copula 'is' is omitted, but the phrase with the nouns alone none the less energetically expresses the same thing. Likewise with the cup filled with wine. It becomes the blood of the 'testament,' according to the usual meaning of the Greek *diatheke*, or the 'covenant,' according to the Septuagint. The first covenant had been made with pouring of blood (Ex. 24 : 8), it will be the same with the second ; this blood is the blood of Jesus even now mystically shed ; 'for many' (10 : 45) does not exclude anyone. Christ's final reflection, placed by Luke before the institution of the Eucharist, shows clearly that it was his farewell before dying. The kingdom of God is compared to a banquet, a metaphor used by the rabbis to signify the life beyond. It might be thought that Jesus alludes to the time which followed his resurrection, but the word

shed on behalf of many. ²⁵ Amen I say to you, that henceforth I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.'

²⁶ And when they had said a hymn, they went forth to the Mount of Olives. ²⁷ And Jesus saith to them: 'You will all be scandalized, for it is written, "I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be dispersed"; ²⁸ but after I am risen, I will go before you into Galilee.' ²⁹ Peter said to him, 'Although

'new' indicates a wine of a new nature, worthy of the new order in heaven, of which the Eucharist is the token on earth. It would almost seem that Jesus himself drank of the consecrated cup: such is the view of St. Chrysostom and St. Thomas Aquinas.

Christ foretells the flight of the disciples and Peter's denial

26-31. According to Mark and Matthew this prediction was made on the road, whilst according to Luke and John all the discourses are pronounced in the upper room. It is well known that the Evangelists do not always distribute events according to the same order. The grouping of all the words of Christ gives a more solemn character to these last discourses: they are the Master's *novissima verba*. But discoursing on the way was customary with our Lord. He quotes Zachary (13: 7), the Hebrew text of which says literally: 'Sword . . . smite the shepherd and the flock shall be scattered.' God is giving this order. In the Gospel, the meaning is about the same though in a more compressed form. Jesus sees in advance his disciples taking to flight like frightened sheep. He reassures

all shall be scandalized, yet not I.' ³⁰ And Jesus saith to him : ' Amen I say to thee, to-day this very night, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice.' ³¹ But he spoke all the more vehemently, ' Although I should have to die with thee, I will not deny thee.' And in like manner said they all.

³² And they come to a farm called Gethsemane ; and he saith to his disciples, ' Sit you here, whilst I pray.' ³³ And he taketh with him Peter and James and John ; and he began to be dismayed and distressed. ³⁴ And he saith to them : ' My soul is sorrowful even

them, assigning them a rendezvous in their beloved Galilee, after his resurrection. Peter cannot stand the idea that his Master is doubting him. If there were presumption in his words, and a tendency to believe himself better than the rest, his pluck came surely from a more ardent love. Christ's answer should have disconcerted him ; it only calls forth more energetic protestations, All the Evangelists place the three denials of Peter before the cock's crow : Mark alone says with precision, before the cock crow twice.

The prayer at Gethsemane

32-42. Jesus did not intend to spend that night in Bethany. He was looking in the direction of the Mount of Olives for a place fitted for prayer. He thus reached Gethsemane (' oil press '), a small rustic resort having a garden planted with olive trees. He took with him only Peter, James, and John, and even from them he tore himself away, in order to implore his Father in solitude. As early as the fourth century the Christians of Jerusalem had built a church on that spot ; its ruins were discovered by the Franciscans in 1920.

unto death. Stay you here and watch.' ³⁵ And when he was gone forward a little, he fell upon the ground, and prayed that if it were possible the hour might pass away from him. ³⁶ And he said : ' Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee, turn aside this cup from me ; yet not what I will, but what thou wilt.' ³⁷ And he cometh and findeth them asleep, and he saith to Peter : ' Simon, sleepest thou ? Couldst thou not watch one hour ? ' ³⁸ Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.'

³⁹ And going away again, he prayed, saying the

The thought of the Passion then came to Jesus so vividly, with both the torture of physical pain and the poignancy of untold humiliations, that he is overwhelmed. Mark notes dismay and distress, and disgust or at least repugnance. This hour, namely, these painful moments, are like a cup which he shrinks from drinking. He says it to the Father in broken words. *Abba* is an Aramaic word which was soon translated into Greek ; but its syllables were preserved in the memory of Christians. Mark reproduces them for us. Nowhere in the New Testament does the human nature of Jesus appear more abandoned to itself, nearer to us and to our weaknesses. This was doubtless necessary to refute heretics too exclusively preoccupied with his glory. This narrative, so clearly describing a will utterly obedient to the Father's will and still, owing to its natural repugnances, so distinct from it, was used to prove against the Monothelites that Christ had a human faculty of willing, that is, he had our human nature in its integrity.

People overwhelmed by grief find it impossible to

same words. ⁴⁰ And when he returned, he found them asleep, for their eyes were heavy; and they knew not what to answer him. ⁴¹ And he cometh the third time, and saith to them, 'Sleep on now, and rest! It is enough! The hour is come; the Son of man is to be betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴² Arise, let us go; behold, he that betrayeth me is at hand.'

⁴³ And straightway, whilst he was yet speaking, cometh Judas, one of the twelve, and with him a multitude with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the scribes and the ancients. ⁴⁴ Now he that betrayed him had given them a sign, saying: 'Whom-

remain alone; they anxiously seek consolation from others. Jesus comes to his Apostles: but he has to encourage them. Their spirit was willing when they believed themselves strong enough to brave all dangers; they were about to experience how timid are those who are too attached to bodily comfort.

Christ's last words (verses 41 f.) are hard to understand. It seems that the Master, tired of recommending watchfulness to his Apostles, finally said: 'Sleep on now, as you like! I will not say one more word. But do you not see that your heavy slumbers will be broken by others? The traitor is here.'

The betrayal. Christ is seized

43-50. Mark does not say that Jesus went to the other Apostles. Perhaps they came, when they heard the tumult of the advancing crowd. Judas knew that he would find his Master in that place, either because it was his habit to go there, or because Judas himself might have discovered his plans for that night. The

soever I shall kiss, that is he ; seize him and hold him carefully, whilst leading him away.'

⁴⁵ And he came, and straightway he went up to him and saith, ' Rabbi ! ' And he kissed him. ⁴⁶ And they laid hands on him and seized him. ⁴⁷ But one of the bystanders, drawing his sword, struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear. ⁴⁸ And Jesus answering, said to them : ' Are you come out, as to a robber, with swords and clubs to arrest me ? ⁴⁹ I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and you did not lay hands on me. But that the Scriptures may be fulfilled.' ⁵⁰ And all left him and fled.

mob was recruited from men ready for any crime. Even to-day shepherds in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem carry their cutlasses in their belts, and heavy clubs in their hands. According to a rather ancient tradition, the seizure took place at the entrance of the grotto called the Grotto of the Agony. The signal given by Judas was a very natural gesture, for the disciples of the rabbis used to kiss them in sign of affection and respect. His words, more developed in Mark, are shameful. The traitor intends to earn his money without taking any risk. He tells them to hold Christ firmly, because he will feel safer if Christ cannot escape, and also because he knows the devotedness of the other disciples. In fact, someone strikes a blow. Mark does not mention his name, but we know it was Peter. Jesus' words would be rather strange, if there were only a low rabble. So Luke completes the narrative by mentioning some Sanhedrists (22 : 52). This is one of the occurrences when Mark faithfully reproduces the words pronounced without framing them properly. His narrative reflects, as it were, the disorder of that scene : a sur-

⁵¹ And a certain young man followed him, with a linen cloth cast about his naked body, and they seized him ; ⁵² but he, casting off the cloth, fled naked.

⁵³ And they led Jesus away unto the high priest ; and all the chief priests and the ancients and the scribes

prise in the night, the traitor's perfidy, the sword smiting uselessly, the grave words of Christ addressed to the whole nation, the disconcerting flight of the disciples.

The unknown young man

51-52. Mark alone relates this incident. The young man is clothed only with a wrap of light texture used as a nightdress. This young man was not a poor peasant with only one tunic, following Jesus for some unknown reason from the time he left the upper room ; he must have been a well-to-do person, probably living in a villa of the neighbourhood, roused from sleep by the noise and sufficiently devoted to the Master to follow him at least for a while. They notice his presence and try to get hold of him ; he flees away naked. Several critics think, not without some likelihood, that this little incident, of no use to the progress of the narrative, is, so to speak, the signature of Mark who would thus have designated himself as a witness of the scene.

Jesus before the High Priest

53-65. During the night, the Temple being closed, it was impossible to gather the Sanhedrin in the ordinary assembly hall. However, the principal ones among the priests were anxious to bring Christ before the supreme tribunal of the nation. It was easy to have it convene at the house of the High Priest, its normal president. Mark does not mention his name : it was Caiaphas, High Priest from the year 18 to 31.

assembled together. ⁵⁴ And Peter followed him afar off, even into the courtyard of the high priest, and sat with the servants, warming himself at the fire. ⁵⁵ Now the chief priests and the whole sanhedrin sought evidence against Jesus, that they might put him to death, and they found none; ⁵⁶ for many bore false witness against him, and their evidence did not agree. ⁵⁷ And some rising up, bore false witness against him, saying: ⁵⁸ ' We heard him say, " I will destroy this temple made with hands, and after three days I will

Peter, having recovered from his first panic, was following, though at a distance. He took no part in the trial, but his presence is mentioned in view of the denial. The servants, having finished their work, were warming themselves in the courtyard, as the spring nights were rather cool; besides, it seems that a fire helps those people to keep watch.

The Sanhedrin did not possess the right of life and death, since Judea was under the direct power of Rome; but if that tribunal expressed its conviction that a Jew had deserved death, this condemnation had to be taken into account by the procurator. The trial being about teaching—for no criminal deed had been charged—witnesses had to be obtained who would agree as to the words of Jesus, a particularly difficult task, as is well known. The only charge that tradition has preserved is expressed by Mark in a very plausible way. The testimony is false because, according to the witnesses, Christ is said to have claimed that he himself would overthrow the buildings of the Temple. Others perhaps better understood that he had spoken about substituting for the Temple of Jerusalem a society in which God would be served in spirit and in truth.

build up another not made with hands.' ' 59 And even so, their evidence did not agree. 60 And the high priest arose in the midst [of the council] and asked Jesus, saying: 'Answerest thou nothing? What is it that these men allege against thee?' 61 But he held his peace and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked him, and said to him, 'Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed [God]?' 62 And Jesus said: 'I am. And you shall see the Son of man sitting

Suspecting that there was some truth in the accusation, the High Priest openly revealed the dread misgiving that was in the minds of all. Does the prisoner pretend to be the Christ? And what kind of Christ? Merely the Son of David, or truly the Son of God, this Blessed One whose sacred name men should not dare to pronounce? Luke has drawn a sharper distinction between the two questions. The second one is implied in Mark's phrase, for the Sanhedrists knew full well that Jesus proclaimed himself to be more than the Son of David (12 : 35-37) and that there would have been no blasphemy in a mere Messianic claim. This time Jesus speaks because the question is clear, decisive, officially asked of him by the religious authority of Israel. He will die for confessing that he is the Son of God—others will die after him because they profess the Godhead of Christ. There must be no doubt at all about his personal affirmation, the foundation of our faith. He answers them: 'I am.' The words which follow are destined also for all ages; but they have been expressed, for the sake of those doctors, by two quotations from Holy Writ (Dan. 7 : 14 ; Ps. 110 : 1), combined together by Jesus. He refers his hearers to Daniel's vision, the substance of which rather than the

on the right hand of the Power and coming with the clouds of heaven.' ⁶³ And the high priest rent his robes and saith: 'What need we any further witnesses?' ⁶⁴ You have heard the blasphemy; what think you?' And they all condemned him to be worthy of death. ⁶⁵ And some began to spit upon him, and to cover his face and buffet him, and to say to him, 'Prophecy!' And the servants struck him in the face. ⁶⁶ And whilst Peter was below in the courtyard, there cometh one of the maid-servants of the high priest; ⁶⁷ and having seen Peter warming himself, she looked closely at him and saith, 'Thou also wast with the Nazarene,

imagery is to be retained: You shall see him, that is, you shall be able to learn from evidence that the Messiah whom I claim to be is invested with divine rank. He makes himself, then, equal to God. The High Priest perceives it clearly, since he accuses him of blasphemy; and the others also, since without any hesitation at all, this time they condemn him to death. They so far lose even the sense of their dignity as grossly to insult him. The servants have their share in this pastime. It was like a game in which a blind-folded person is asked to name the one who touches him. The word 'prophecy' must have come from the lips of the doctors. What prophet of the future is he, if he cannot even guess who buffets him?

Peter's threefold denial

66-72. From the hall where the trial had taken place, Mark brings us downstairs to the courtyard where Peter was standing near the fire. This was untimely sensuality on the part of Peter if he was warming himself; and it was imprudence, for in the red

with Jesus.' ⁶⁸ But he denied it, saying, ' I neither know nor understand what thou sayest.' And he went out into the vestibule. And a cock crew. ⁶⁹ And the maid-servant having seen him again, began to say to the bystanders, ' This is one of them.' ⁷⁰ But he denied again. And after a while they that stood by said again to Peter, ' Truly, thou art one of them, for thou art a Galilean.' ⁷¹ But he began to swear in cursing, ' I know not this man of whom you speak.' ⁷² And straightway a cock crew for the second time. And Peter remembered the word that Jesus had said to him, ' Before a cock crow twice, thou wilt deny me thrice.' And he began to weep.

glare of the firelight he could be recognized. Everything is clear here in Mark's text as in that of the other Evangelists. The four Gospels affirm a threefold denial, nothing more : and it is enough. It would give them the lie, to increase this number on the pretext that the circumstances mentioned by some of them cannot be reduced to three denials. Firm as to the fact itself, tradition may have varied on certain modalities which do not alter the substance of the facts. Peter could be recognized as a Galilean on account of his accent and certain peculiarities of his dialect. To swear in cursing is to bring down on one's own head the curse of God if one's statement is not true. Peter affirms that he does not know Jesus : he refrains from expressing a judgement regarding his Messiahship : nothing proves that he lost the faith which he had confessed at Cæsarea Philippi. He avoids making a confession and eludes the perplexity, as did later some Christians who found a way to avoid being challenged to sacrifice to idols. This was cowardice, not apostasy.

CHAPTER XV

¹ And straightway in the morning the chief priests with the ancients and the scribes and the whole sanhedrin, took counsel together, and binding Jesus, led him away and delivered him to Pilate.

Jesus delivered to Pilate

15 : 1. Mark glides over the meeting of the Sanhedrin in the early morning, the only one mentioned by Luke, who assigns to it the trial of Jesus. The sentence of the Jews could not be executed ; the Roman magistrate would not have consented to execute it without ascertaining that it was legitimate, without taking it to his own account and carrying it out in his own name. Pontius Pilate held the title of Procurator of the province of Judea from the year 26 to 36. By the Jews he was considered as haughty, cruel, and corrupt. He certainly acted with a strong hand, but Tiberius would not have tolerated an officer so long if he had been really such as described by the Jews. Pilate realized that Jesus was not a menace to good order—for which the procurator was responsible—and he would have preferred not to condemn him. But he sacrificed Christ without scruple, when he saw in his death a means of preserving his own tranquillity. According to Josephus, his residence was Herod's palace, which had become the actual citadel ; it is quite possible, however, that he judged our Lord in the Antonia tower that dominated the Temple, which was more closely watched at the time of the Passover.

² And Pilate asked him, 'Art thou the king of the Jews?' And he answered him, 'Thou sayest it.'

³ And the chief priests accused him in many things.

⁴ And Pilate again asked him, saying: 'Answerest thou nothing? See in how many things they accuse thee!'

⁵ But Jesus made no further answer, so that Pilate wondered.

⁶ Now at the feast he was wont to release to them one of the prisoners, whomsoever they asked.

⁷ And there was one called Barabbas, imprisoned

Jesus before Pilate

2-15. The Sanhedrists knew that Pilate would be quite indifferent to a religious charge, even that of blasphemy against their God. But for anyone to proclaim himself a king, was rebellion against Roman authority. Therefore they bring Jesus to his tribunal for claiming the title of Messiah, which Pilate would construct as King of the Jews. Jesus had not indeed claimed a profane dignity which would so poorly fit his person and his work; but interrogated by a stranger on his Messianic right, he repeats a claim which was to be taken as the confession of a political crime. Then he remains silent. The magistrate, astonished at the zeal of the Jewish leaders and at the attitude and silence of the accused, may have suspected him less than them, and thought to withdraw from the affair, thanks to the intervention of the populace. Modern critics have said that such a weakening of Roman justice in order to please the crowd was unlikely. But this is not the only known instance of it. In Judea, a liberation like that (*abolitio*) was customary as a preliminary to the Passover.

with the seditious men who in the sedition had committed murder. ⁸ And the multitude having come up, they began to claim what he was wont to grant. ⁹ But Pilate answered them, saying, ' Will you that I release to you the king of the Jews ? ' ¹⁰ For he understood that the chief priests had delivered him up out of envy. ¹¹ And the chief priests stirred up the people that he should rather release to them Barabbas. ¹² And Pilate again answering, said to them, ' What then shall I do with him whom you call the king of the Jews ? ' ¹³ Again they cried out, ' Crucify him ! ' ¹⁴ Pilate said to them, ' Why, what evil hath he done ? ' But they cried out the more, ' Crucify him ! ' ¹⁵ Pilate, then willing to satisfy the people, released to them

Pilate proposed to grant it in behalf of Jesus. Quick to dodge this blow, the priests suggest to the crowd the name of Barabbas, the leader in a sedition. The nationalistic character of that sedition had made him popular. The number of those accused and the difficulty of discerning the most guilty had probably retarded Roman justice.

Barabbas was the sturdy fellow popular with the rabble. Did they know exactly what Christ claimed ? First they prefer Barabbas, and as the acquittal of Jesus might be an obstacle, they vow him to the tortures of the cross. Surely the peasants of Galilee could not have turned so completely and so easily against him. But in large cities there are always wicked characters, docile to leaders of seditions, ready to shed blood. This time the people and their chiefs were of one mind. Pilate yielded. Scourging was the ordinary preliminary to crucifixion for those who were not Roman citizens. The torturers used leathern

Barabbas, for whom they asked, and delivered up Jesus, after having him scourged, to be crucified.

¹⁶ And the soldiers led him away into the courtyard, that is, the pretorium; and they called together the whole cohort. ¹⁷ And they clothed him with purple, and put on his head a crown of thorns which they had plaited. ¹⁸ And they began to salute him, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' ¹⁹ And they struck his head with a reed, and they spat on him, and bent

thongs weighted with jagged edges of bone or iron chains with leaden balls at the end.

Jesus is crowned with thorns

16-20. To the legal torture of scourging, the soldiers add the supreme humiliation of a mock coronation. The rabble of large cities in Egypt and in the East used to practise this brutal sport mostly on the generally despised Jews. Probably there had been some precedents to the horrible scene in the prætorium. What an opportunity when a poor fellow exposes himself to their taunts by claiming the title of King of the Jews. The thorny laurels and the sceptre and the cloak must have given as much fun to them as they cause stupor to our faith. But, for the Son of God, a crown of gold would have been so unwelcome! The prætorium was the official residence of the general. It is not clear whether this word refers here to the most public part of the building, the open courtyard. According to the Vulgate, it does, and this seems more natural, since it could be a meeting-place for the cohort which made up the Jerusalem garrison or which had been brought by the governor. If such be the case, five or six hundred men are summoned to witness this

their knees to do him homage. ²⁰ And after they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple and put his own garments on him. And they led him out to crucify him; ²¹ and they compelled a certain passer-by, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming from the country,

brutal pastime, whilst everything was being made ready for the crucifixion.

The way of the cross

21-22. They go out of the prætorium and even out of the city, for crosses were always planted outside the gates, where there was enough vacant space, and where the passing crowds were sufficiently large that the punishment might produce a more salutary effect, by the fear that it inspired. The cross was originally a mere stake, then a pole to which the criminals were bound. It was often terminated by a furca or gibbet with points turned upwards. At other times—this was the cross properly so called—to the upright pole a transverse bar was added, to which the sufferer was fastened, arms outstretched, with cords or more ordinarily with nails. This was the penalty inflicted on slaves. They were not put to death with the sword, but were abandoned, tortured by hunger and thirst, to become the prey of dogs and vultures. The condemned person had to carry his cross to the place of execution. Jesus being too weak, the soldiers obliged a certain Simon, a Jew from Cyrene, to carry it for him. Mark is the only Evangelist who mentions the name of Simon's sons, who certainly must have belonged to the Christian community. They went to a place called in Aramaic *Goulgoltha* ('a skull'), which was pronounced Golgotha. From early times people were pleased to

the father of Alexander and of Rufus, to take up his cross. ²² And they brought him to the place [called] Golgotha, which translated is ' the Place of the Skull.'

²³ And they offered him wine, mingled with myrrh, but he took it not. ²⁴ And they crucified him, and divided his garments, casting lots upon them, what each man should take. ²⁵ Now it was the third

imagine that the cross had been planted just above the skull of Adam ; but St. Jerome does not countenance this legend, however ingenious and pretty. Possibly the name skull refers to the skull-shaped knoll of Calvary.

The crucifixion

23-32. The ancients were not familiar with the use of anæsthetics ; and the Romans would not have taken the trouble to soften the pain of a crucified sufferer. With the Jews, it was customary to give him a draught of wine medicated with incense so as to stupefy him. Though Mark makes no distinction of persons, it may be held that this draught of wine and myrrh had been brought by the holy women who were at the foot of the cross. Jesus refused to deaden his sufferings by an artificial excitation very similar to drunkenness. The crucifixion was probably conducted after the Roman fashion. The upright pole was fixed into the ground beforehand. The sufferer, completely naked, was then uplifted. The hands were nailed to the transverse bar, probably before this was fixed on the pole. Then the feet were nailed on a kind of wooden stand. With the Jews, nakedness was not complete, and the Romans may have respected that custom. The garments were divided according to the Roman law.

hour when they crucified him. ²⁶ And the inscription recording the charge against him ran thus: 'The King of the Jews.' ²⁷ And with him they crucified two thieves, the one on his right hand and the other on his left. ²⁹ And they that passed by railed at him, wagging their heads and saying: 'Ha, thou that destroyest the temple and in three days buildest it up again! ³⁰ Save thyself, coming down from the cross.' ³¹ In like manner the chief priests with the scribes spoke in mockery to one another: 'Others he saved,

The 'third hour' has raised some difficulty because John (John 19: 14) mentions the sixth hour, as they were in the prætorium. Even in the time of St. Jerome the solution was sought in a copyist's error in Mark. Others have recourse to different solutions. It might be held that Mark's figure is part of a systematic and approximate division of time, in periods of three hours.

According to the Roman custom, the condemned person carried a tablet on which was written in a few words the reason for his condemnation. The other Evangelists state more expressly that the inscription written for Jesus, of which they give the complete text, was nailed on the cross above his head. Perhaps there was no special reason why two brigands were crucified near Jesus. Still, the care with which they were placed on either side of him seems ironical and calculated to throw contempt upon him. The passers-by add their jeers; the charge of the false witnesses, judged insufficient for a legal condemnation, must have been exploited by the Sanhedrists with the people. Jesus was pictured to them as an impostor who would have destroyed the Temple, but was unable evidently to rebuild it in three days. The chief priests and the

himself he cannot save. ³² Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe.' Even they that were crucified along with him reproached him.

³³ And when the sixth hour was come, there was darkness over the whole earth until the ninth hour.

³⁴ And at the ninth hour, Jesus cried out with a loud voice, '*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani,*' which translated is, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' ³⁵ And some of the bystanders hearing this,

scribes with scornful insolence profess that they are only too willing to believe that he is the Christ; but it is about time that he should prove it.

Last moments and death of Jesus

33-37. The sixth hour is noon. For three long hours nothing seems to happen, at least Mark mentions nothing but darkness. It could not be an eclipse, for the paschal moon was at the full; but the miraculous intensity of a darkness and blackness which at times falls on Jerusalem in the spring (*Khamsin* of Egypt). As in the days of the Exodus (10 : 22), it is a divine sign addressed to those who are conscious of the facts which bring it about. 'The whole land' must be understood either of Judea, or perhaps only of the whole horizon. It is God's supreme judgement. The darkness manifests his action by inspiring men with a mysterious terror. At the ninth hour Jesus utters words the very sound of which in Aramaic is preserved for us by Mark. It is the opening verse of Psalm xxii, a cry of distress, melting at the end into notes of joyful hope. It is utterly wrong to imagine, as some Rationalists do, that Jesus died despairing of his work, of him-

said: 'Lo, he calleth Elias!' ³⁶ And one ran, and filling a sponge with vinegar put it upon a reed, in order to give him to drink, saying: 'We shall see whether Elias be coming to take him down.' ³⁷ But Jesus having uttered a loud cry, gave up the ghost.

³⁸ And the veil of the temple was rent in twain

self, and of God. Even isolated from their context, those words are still a very tender appeal, a very mild complaint. When mystics have tried to fathom this abyss, they beheld the soul of Jesus in a state of abandonment more cruel still than at Gethsemane, as if his Godhead had placed on his human nature alone the weight of our crimes which he was expiating. Some of those present, scarcely acquainted with the Aramaic language, thought they recognized the name of Elias, the best known among the ancient prophets of Israel. Someone, a soldier probably, soaked a sponge with a mixture of vinegar and water, the ordinary drink of the soldiers. Pity inspired him. But, like so many others, he has not courage enough to confess his compassion; to have his act of mercy condoned by the rest, he re-echoes the gibe provoked by the appeal to Elias, 'Let us give time to Elias to do something for him!'

Jesus expired after uttering a loud cry. A very rare case; the Fathers see in it a proof of the freedom with which he gave back his soul to his Father.

After the death of Jesus

38-41. There were two curtains in the Temple: one hung before the entrance to the Holy Place, the other separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies.

from top to bottom. ³⁹ And the centurion, who had stood over against him, seeing him thus give up the ghost, said, ' Truly this man was Son of God.' ⁴⁰ And there were also women looking on from afar, among whom were Mary of Magdala, and Mary the mother of James the Less and of Joses, and Salome, ⁴¹ who were

It may be either ; reasons of symbolism apply to both. In any case, there is a rupture, a sign that the ancient sanctuary has become profane and is about to be abandoned by God to its fate. The centurion had seen many crucified criminals weaken little by little and insensibly give up the ghost. Jesus dies uttering a loud cry. This is extraordinary. Moreover, the attitude of the dying one must have moved that man who was in contact only with rough people. Everything in this death and in this man bears the stamp of the divine. Whether the centurion concludes from his pagan ideas that Jesus is a God, or whether he gives the lie to the denials of the enemies whom he may have heard (Matt. 27 : 39-43), his testimony is the cry of an honest conscience, and the expression of a regret. From the very instant, the death of Jesus wrought its results in the pagan world.

Mark pictures for us a large group of women looking on from afar. Nothing prevents us from believing that some came nearer to the cross, as did Mary, mother of Jesus, who, we know, stood near the cross with John (John 19 : 25). Those mentioned by Mark are Mary of Magdala, delivered from seven devils (Luke 8 : 2), another Mary, mother of Joses and James the Less, that is, probably, the younger. These two men are surely the same as James and Joses (6 : 3), ' brothers ' of Jesus, but not uterine brothers, as is clearly indi-

following and ministering to him when he was in Galilee, and many others who had come up with him to Jerusalem.

⁴² And when evening was already come, because it was the *parasceve*, that is, the eve of the sabbath, ⁴³ there came Joseph of Arimathæa, a councillor of good position, who himself also was awaiting the kingdom of God, and he went in boldly to Pilate and

cated here. Mark adds an epithet to the name of James, because he speaks here in his own name, namely, in the name of the Christian community which knew also James, the son of Zebedee, that is, the Less and the Greater. Salome was probably the mother of the sons of Zebedee. All these women were Galilean or, at least, had come with Jesus to Jerusalem. Mark mentions only those who will come to the sepulchre, because he prepares his narrative, and this is probably the reason why he did not mention Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Burial of Jesus

42-47. The ' *parasceve* ' is the day of preparation, that is, for the sabbath. This shows that the crucifixion took place on Friday. They hasten, because the following day is a holiday. But was not the Passover a holiday ? Mark agrees here with John : the Saviour, then, must have advanced by one day the eating of the *Pasch*.

Joseph of Arimathea (Rentis now) was a member of the Sanhedrin as belonging to the lay aristocracy. His request is one that cannot be refused, provided the death is ascertained. The noble Sanhedrist had access to Pilate, and did not need to explain the motives of his

asked for the body of Jesus. ⁴⁴ But Pilate wondered that he should be already dead. And sending for the centurion, he asked him whether he were already dead; ⁴⁵ and on being informed by the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph. ⁴⁶ And having bought a linen sheet, and taking him down, he wrapped him up in the sheet, and laid him in a sepulchre which had been hewn out of the rock, and he rolled a stone to the entrance of the tomb. ⁴⁷ Now Mary of Magdala and Mary [the mother] of Joses beheld where he was laid.

CHAPTER XVI

¹ And when the sabbath was over, Mary of Magdala, and Mary [the mother] of James, and Salome, bought

attachment to a condemned person. According to the Jewish Law (Deut. 21 : 23), the bodies were not to remain hanging : they should be buried before night. Nothing proves that Joseph had been firmer in his hopes than the Apostles, but he was in a better situation to act than they, being even the owner of a tomb hewn in the rock. The stone rolled to close a tomb has seemed ridiculous to a number of critics. Still, the tomb of the Queen of Adiabene in Jerusalem is an immense sepulchre closed by a stone rolled in front of the entrance. To open it, one has to roll away the stone.

The empty tomb ; the angel

16 : 1-8. On the sabbath day nothing could be done. The three women are the same that Mark mentioned after the death of Jesus. The other Mary is named the mother of James and Joses (15 : 40), or the

spices that coming, they might anoint him. ² And very early in the morning on the first day of the week they came to the sepulchre, the sun being now risen.

³ And they said to one another, 'Who will roll us away the stone from the entrance of the sepulchre?'

⁴ And after having looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back to the side. For it was very great. ⁵ And on entering into the sepulchre, they saw a

young man sitting on the right side, clothed with a white robe; and they were terrified. ⁶ But he saith

to them: 'Be not affrighted. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified; he is risen, he is not here.

Behold the place where they laid him. ⁷ But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee; there you shall see him, as he told you.'

⁸ And going forth, they fled from the sepulchre, for they were seized with fear and were beside themselves.

mother of Joses (15: 47), again the mother of James (16: 1). When the sabbath was over, the stores opened early; the women are able to buy spices; but they are afraid, and justly so, that they may not find anyone to roll away the stone which, in the case of an important tomb, was very large. Now, the stone had been rolled back. They enter the tomb. Ordinarily in those rooms there were two slabs, one on the right, the other on the left, on which the bodies were laid. Even if they are carved out in the shape of a cradle, there is room enough to sit on the edge. In the mind of Mark, the young man seated on the right side is surely an angel; however, Mark speaks only of his external appearance. The words are quick, disconnected, winged. A rendezvous in Galilee is assigned to the

And they said nothing to any man, for they were afraid.

⁹ And after his resurrection early on the first day of the week, he first appeared to Mary of Magdala, out of whom he had cast seven devils. ¹⁰ She went and told it to those who had been with him, who were

disciples and Peter. But the women are seized with fear and fail to carry the message.

Appearance of the risen Christ to Mary of Magdala

9-11. From this verse on, it is very difficult to explain the context. There is no question of Galilee, for the appearance to the Eleven does not take place in Galilee. Some have imagined a Galilee on the Mount of Olives. But this is without foundation. Must we suppose that, as the holy women had not delivered their message, Jesus appeared to one of them to oblige her to go to the disciples? Or did Mark, after orientating his narrative towards Galilee, decide abruptly to speak only of Jerusalem? Many critics deem that the narrative, interrupted after verse 8, was resumed on a new plan either by Mark or by someone else. It is certain that this finale of Mark is canonical and inspired. It was known to the most ancient Fathers, and it is surely meant by the decree of the Council of Trent.

Mary of Magdala was named three times (15: 40, 47; 16: 1). She is introduced here as a person out of whom Christ had cast seven devils. Jesus appears to her in the first place, to entrust her with an official mission, which however does not exclude an appearance of the Son to his mother, since their intimate relations are not the subject of the oral gospel. The

mourning and weeping. ¹¹ And they, hearing that he was alive and had been seen by her, did not believe.

¹² After this he appeared in another shape to two of them, as they were walking along on their way to the country. ¹³ And they went back and told it to the rest ; and even then they believed not.

¹⁴ Later he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were at table, and he upbraided them with their want of faith and stubbornness of heart, because they had not believed those who had seen him risen from the dead.

appearance to Mary Magdalene and her mission are related by John (20 : 11-18).

Appearance to two disciples

12-13. The second appearance is a summary in few words of the appearance of Jesus to the disciples at Emmaus, so exquisitely related by Luke (24 : 13-32).

Appearance to the Eleven. Their mission

14-18. Until now the Apostles—the Eleven—have manifested only unbelief. The writer's aim is clearly to emphasize this unbelief conquered only by the appearance of Jesus. But when did this appearance take place ? On the one hand, it corresponds exactly to the appearance on the evening of the Resurrection, at Jerusalem (Luke 24 : 36-43 ; John 20 : 10-24) ; on the other hand, it implies the mission given by the Lord to the Apostles in Galilee, according to Matthew (28 : 16-20) ; finally, it seems to end with the Ascension, as in the perspective of Luke. This is evidently a very compressed narrative. The writer frees himself from the ordinary methods of history, to sum up in one scene

¹⁵ And he said to them : ' Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. ¹⁶ He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved : he that believeth not shall be condemned. ¹⁷ And these signs shall follow them that believe : in my name they shall cast out devils, they shall speak with new tongues, ¹⁸ and they shall take up serpents in their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them : they shall lay hands upon the sick and they shall recover.'

¹⁹ So the Lord Jesus, after speaking to them, was taken up into heaven and ' took his seat at the right

all the relations of the risen Christ with his Apostles up to his Ascension.

' The whole creation ' must be restricted to mankind, according to the Hebrew custom. The gift of miracles is not promised to anyone who would believe in any way at all, but to the community of the faithful, and to some of them, individually, according to the interests of the kingdom of God. The cases quoted are examples chosen among others. The tongues are ' new ' relatively to those who knew them not. The serpents shall not harm them : the incident of Paul (Acts 28 : 3 f.) is a case of that immunity.

Ascension of Christ and preaching of the gospel

19-20. Catholic exegetes are unanimous in acknowledging that the Ascension did not follow immediately after the preceding discourse. The writer rushes to the end, having in view only a short summary. The same impression left by the reading of Luke's Gospel (24 : 50) must be corrected from the intention of the same writer (Acts 1 : 1 ff.), of placing an interval between

hand of God.' ²⁰ But they went forth and preached everywhere, the Lord working withal and confirming the word by the signs that followed thereupon.

the appearance to the Eleven and the Ascension. On no better ground could we rest the liberty of exegesis relative to the grouping of facts.

'Sitting at the right hand of God' is evidently a metaphorical expression. The Evangelist does not write here any longer as a historian. He makes us realize, in the name of Christian faith, the accomplishment of what Jesus had announced to the Sanhedrists (14: 62). The testimony of the Apostles is at the basis of this faith, confirmed also by miracles.

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